

From Peace to Freedom

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From Peace to Freedom

*Quaker Rhetoric and
the Birth of American
Antislavery, 1657–1761*

BRYCCHAN CAREY

Yale

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For Sarah

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Introduction

ALMOST EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT Quakers were at the forefront of campaigns to abolish slavery and the slave trade. Rather fewer know how they came to hold that position. This book attempts to explain how Quakers turned against slavery, and it reveals that the process was neither easy nor inevitable. Instead, Quakers argued about the morality of slavery among themselves for more than a century before directing their antislavery arguments outward to the wider world. The book shows how Quaker settlers in seventeenth-century Barbados attempted unsuccessfully to reconcile Quaker beliefs with their desire to keep slaves, and how that debate spilled over into the new Quaker colony in Pennsylvania. As early as 1696, Friends in Philadelphia were asked “not to Encourage the bringing in any more Negroes,” advice echoed by London Quakers who, on paper at least, banned Friends from trading in slaves in 1713 and, when this was ignored, did so again in 1727. In Philadelphia, Friends had a sustained debate about the morality of slave trading throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, reflected in many publications and in records of numerous meetings, and culminating in 1758 in the decision by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting not merely to advise against slave trading, but to make it an enforceable breach of Quaker discipline. Three years later, in 1761, the same decision was taken by the London Yearly Meeting, committing Quakers everywhere to a future of antislavery campaigning.

A quarter-century later, Quakers were in the vanguard of the abolitionist movements that sprung up on both sides of the Atlantic and which campaigned vigorously between 1780 and 1888 for an end to both slavery and the slave trade. Over the past two centuries, many historians, economists, cultural scholars, literary critics, and theologians

have asked how this movement came about. The first was Thomas Clarkson, who initiated abolitionist history in 1808 with his two-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*. Clarkson's *History* is principally concerned with the rise and progress of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, the organization founded in London in 1786 and in which Clarkson himself played a prominent role. Throughout his book, however, Clarkson is aware of an older presence. In a "map" which portrays the history of the abolitionist movement as a network of rivers and tributaries, two of the three rivers represent communities of Quakers, springing from the twin streams of "George Fox" and "Qua. Pennsylvania 1688." Although not a Quaker himself, Clarkson argued that these seventeenth-century Quaker "forerunners" of modern abolitionists bequeathed to following generations a dislike of slavery that in the eighteenth century would become detestation. In 1727, the London Yearly Meeting of Quakers had minuted "that y^e Importing negroes from their native Country & Relations by ffrinds is not a Commendable nor allowed practice.' Although this in fact only repeated verbatim what the London Yearly Meeting had written to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting fourteen years earlier, Clarkson saw this as the crucial moment, the point at which Quakers turned against slavery. "Thus we see," he reasoned:

That every Quaker, born since the year 1727, was nourished as it were in a fixed hatred against it. He was taught, that any concern in it was a crime of the deepest dye. He was taught, that the bearing of his testimony against it was a test of unity with those of the same religious profession. The discipline of the Quakers was therefore a school for bringing them up as advocates for the abolition of this trade.¹

Clarkson's description of the entire Quaker movement as a "school" for abolitionism is somewhat overassertive, while his identification of 1727 as the key date for the movement's transformation to abolitionism is, as this book makes clear, not entirely secure. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Quakers were indeed in many ways the "forerunners"

of the abolition movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that would transform both the political ideology and the practical politics of several nations. Following Clarkson, most historians recognize that the early history of abolitionism is intimately entwined with the early history of Quakerism. Rather surprisingly, only a very small number have described in any detail the ways in which Quakers came to embrace antislavery. Accordingly, my first purpose with this book is to join with that small number of scholars who have looked beneath the broad surface of Quaker antislavery history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to discern the complex currents that agitated it from below, and to offer a reassessment of both the facts and the texts from the viewpoint of a literary critic.

Such a reassessment is necessary since, for the most part, historians of Quaker antislavery have paid more attention to results and outcomes than to process. Thus, we read over and again that Quaker antislavery documents written between 1650 and 1750 had “little impact” or “went largely unread.” As Robin Blackburn put it, in his discussion of the questions about slavery raised by the 1688 Germantown Protesters, “such questions were not allowed to disturb the Holy Experiment in colonial settlement.” As a literary scholar, I take another approach. Rather than judging a debate by its outcome, I choose to see it on its own terms and to read it as part of an emerging discourse in which the formation of an idea, or the development of a particular way of expressing an idea, is as significant as the fulfillment of that idea. Thus, instead of relegating the ideas, rhetoric, and debate of Quaker antislavery protesters in the colonial period to the status of curious but inconsequential antiquarian relics, I instead assert that in this period Quakers produced a discourse of antislavery that underpinned and informed all later antislavery discourse, both in America and in Europe. In other words, whether it was allowed or not, discussion of slavery profoundly disturbed the Holy Experiment in colonial settlement. The second and main purpose of this book, therefore, is to present a history of the rise, progress, and consolidation of the Quaker discourse of antislavery.²

To support my thesis, this book offers a reading of some of the earliest antislavery texts in the English language, and shows that the development of a shared set of arguments against slavery by the Quakers

of Pennsylvania, although neither painless nor inevitable, was nevertheless the result of a sustained public dialogue within a community that was troubled by slavery from the start. The first tentative Quaker text to question slavery, a letter by George Fox, was written and circulated in manuscript in the 1650s, and reprinted in the 1690s. It has thus always been relatively accessible to scholars. Most other seventeenth-century Quaker antislavery writings vanished more or less without trace, although not without influence, until historians excavated them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A similar pattern characterizes Quaker antislavery writings from the first half of the eighteenth century. Tucked away in local archives or bundled with masses of only tangentially related material, they remained accessible only to specialists until late in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, examination of both the printed and manuscript writings by Quakers in London, Barbados, New England, and, in particular, Pennsylvania shows that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, Quakers had very largely reached a consensus on outlawing slave trading within their own communities, codified by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758 and the London Yearly Meeting in 1761. In addition, they had already started to reach out beyond their own borders and to take the debate to other communities across the Atlantic world. Since this debate is accessible only through the written records that remain, the third purpose of this book is to tell the story of how this transformation came about through sustained close reading of those texts.

In a sense, this book can be read as a “prequel” to my earlier study, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility*. There, I analyzed the rhetoric of antislavery in the British context between the years 1760 and 1807, showing that it was inextricably bound up with the discourse of sensibility. The choice of the date 1807 was obvious since that was the year in which the British parliament outlawed the slave trade. The year 1760 was a less clearly defined date. Although it has been the choice of generations of historians—it was in that year that George III began his long reign—its relevance to the British antislavery debate was less obvious. Nevertheless, although the reasons why were not immediately plain, it was clear to me while writing *British Abolitionism* that, very shortly after 1760, antislavery sentiment became an increasingly insistent component

of British political and literary discourse. My investigation into the communication between John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, Granville Sharp, the instigator of the celebrated “Somerset Case,” and Anthony Benezet, the Philadelphia Quaker and opponent of slavery, provided the key I needed. As is so often the case with eighteenth-century writing about empire and slavery, the periphery was the driving force, not the metropolis. Opposition to the slave trade became a theme in Britain in the 1760s because Quakers in Philadelphia had taken the radical step of outlawing slave trading within their communities in the 1750s. Quaker antislavery rhetoric emanating from Pennsylvania was thus the key influence that either directly or indirectly mobilized the earliest antislavery efforts in Britain. If in my earlier book I sought to explore the interaction between antislavery rhetoric and the polite, metropolitan discourse of sensibility, in this later book I seek to explore an earlier interaction between antislavery rhetoric and the less polite, though no less persuasive, discourses of colonial commerce and dissenting Protestantism. Taken together, the two books offer an interrelated history of antislavery rhetoric in the Atlantic world of the long eighteenth century.³

As with my previous work, I here attempt to cast light on a historical period, and on a historical problem, by applying the skills of the literary critic. Historians have described what Friends have said or done about slavery with great accuracy. They have produced illuminating quantitative studies of the social and economic contexts of Quaker antislavery. They have located Quaker ideas about slavery in its background of early-modern political ideologies or Protestant theologies. They have not, in general, had a great deal to say about the nuances of Quaker rhetoric, the structure of Quaker texts, the tropes and diction of Quaker writing, or the literary and cultural contexts and resonances of the various tracts, pamphlets, books, and manuscripts that Quakers produced. Accordingly, I here use as a framework the historical narrative of textual production and interpersonal debate that has been established by the work of historians such as David Brion Davis, Thomas Drake, and Jean Soderlund. Within that historical narrative, I locate a commentary on and analysis of the texts in which I make use of some of the skills and preoccupations of literary scholars to demonstrate their rhetorical complexities. The book can be read as literary criticism,

but it can equally be read as literary history, or cultural history, or even as narrative history with an eye for rhetorical nuance.

It may be just as easy to say what this book is not. It is not primarily a narrative history of Quakers and antislavery, although it is based around a historical narrative and can indeed be read for its narrative. Nor is it an attempt to explain, once and for all, the historical origins of antislavery thought, although it does offer support for the thesis that eighteenth-century antislavery had its origins in cultural rather than economic phenomena. Although there is primary research and new material on view, this book is not primarily an attempt to display newly found writings, to present or explain original statistical research on Quaker communities, or to uncover secret histories buried within letters, minutes of meetings, wills, and bills of sale. Instead, this book offers a commentary on and analysis of a century and a half of Quaker writing about slavery, bound by a historical narrative, in which I show that from the outset Quakers were developing both a set of arguments and a set of rhetorical maneuvers to help them first to reconcile slave trading with Quaker principles and then, when that proved impossible, to question and finally prevent Friends from buying and selling slaves. My method is to critically read the texts as one interested in tone, nuance, and diction, as well as one interested in locating texts within a wider historical discourse. Since it would be unfair of me to present close readings of texts that are, for the most part, inaccessible, I have quoted generously. Many, but by no means all, of the texts I examine were reproduced by J. William Frost in his 1980 reader, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, but that important volume is difficult to find beyond major research libraries. I do not intend this volume to be a reader of Quaker antislavery writing, but I do hope that the extensive quotations, taken from the original manuscripts in the case of unpublished sources, will help readers to judge my critical assertions on the texts, and to reach some of their own conclusions.

Slavery, Community, and Place

From Peace to Freedom comments on several related areas of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history and culture. At its core is an

investigation into the processes by which one community, in one place, during one historical period, came to terms with what in the period was a global phenomenon. From its earliest days in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to its painful demise in the late nineteenth century, the Atlantic slave system embroiled millions, from children kidnapped from the towns and villages of West Africa, to wealthy financiers in London, Paris, and New York. A few thousand people grew rich from its profits, but millions of the victims of the Atlantic slave trade suffered and died in the four centuries that slavery remained legal. Enslaved people had always protested directly against their enslavement but, from the late eighteenth century, many thousands of people who were not themselves victims of slavery clamored for an end to the system. In Europe, some legislatures responded to public sentiment and gradually abolished first the slave trade, then slavery. In the Americas, progress was slower and less certain, but by the 1880s slavery had become a criminal activity throughout the Western hemisphere. It was not until 1948, however, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that it became a fundamental principle of international law that “slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Today, slavery is illegal throughout the world. In the decades since the Universal Declaration, scholars from a range of disciplines have been involved in uncovering and understanding the vast quantity of information that has survived from the age of slavery, and in demonstrating the centrality of Atlantic slavery to the development of many discursive, social, and economic structures of the early modern and the modern worlds. Few now dispute the importance of the study of both the history and the cultures of slavery and the slave trade and, accordingly, an extensive body of both popular and specialist literature on the subject is now available. *From Peace to Freedom* adds to that literature. Rather than survey it in detail here, however, the broader history of slavery and abolition will be discussed at the various locations in the book where the context demands it.

Quakerism has also garnered an extensive historiography, which will be referred to at appropriate points in the narrative. Nevertheless, a brief outline may be helpful. The Religious Society of Friends, as the Quakers are more properly known, was one of many Christian

denominations to emerge from the turbulent period of the English Civil War and Interregnum. Unlike many such groups which had a Calvinist emphasis on predestination, Quakers emphasized spiritual equality, preached the possibility of universal salvation, and claimed that everyone had access to the “inward light of God.” Under the inspiration—it is difficult to use the word “leadership” with much accuracy—of such figures as George Fox and James Naylor, the Society grew rapidly in the 1650s without becoming hierarchical or authoritarian. Inevitably, such growth brought it into conflict with the government and established church. Quakers increasingly faced persecution in the 1650s and ’60s. In response, they formalized procedures and developed the structures which, though often modified, characterize Quaker worship and organization to this day. Quaker beliefs, often called “testimonies,” were also formalized at this time. Two important Quaker “testimonies” in particular deserve further explication, not least since perhaps one of the most important reasons why Quakers turned away from slavery was because they believed it violated their “Peace Testimony.” As Peter Brock has shown, Quakers were not the first religious grouping to embrace pacifist principles, but they were the first to crystallize a vague principle into an enforceable tenet of their society. The turning point came in 1660–61, when peaceable Quakers were accused of participating in a violent, but failed, coup d’état. “Friends found it essential,” Brock argues, “to repudiate categorically any association with those radical elements in the state that still harbored thoughts of replacing the monarchy.” Nevertheless, although seemingly hurriedly adopted in the wake of a crisis, “pacifism became a hallmark of Quakerism, and for the next two centuries and more the nonpacifist Friend was the exception, whose minority stand might get him into trouble with the Society, especially if he chose actually to bear arms.”⁴

Quakers were also known for their “speech testimony,” which directed them to speak plainly, if at all. Plain language was not merely unornamented, it was also socially reformative. For instance, Friends eschewed titles and honorifics and addressed everyone by the familiar “thee” instead of the respectful “you” to show that all were equal before God. Richard Bauman has argued that plain language and silence, “rather than merely supporting the main message [of Quakerism]

jointly represented one of its major foci, providing a symbolic vocabulary for conceptualizing that message and an instrument for carrying it into action.” In this analysis, discursive strategies are central to the Quaker project, and thus to understand what early Quakers thought and did we must understand both what they said and how they said it. This applies to their writing as well. In one of a relatively small number of studies of Quaker literary activities, Luella M. Wright argues that three principles underpin Quaker writing in the period 1650–1725. First, “Friends scrupulously avoided a display of learning.” Second, they “rigorously excluded from their pages all types of ornamental phrasing and diction.” Finally, they “sought through appeals of emotional and spiritual nature to acquaint readers with the inner peace which they themselves had attained.” The Quaker writers examined throughout this book are certainly guided by these principles. As we shall see, however, they frequently deviated from them as well. Indeed, Emma Jones Lapsansky reminds us “that ‘plain’ and its enforcement, have always been subject to significant variation in meaning and emphasis among different Quaker meeting communities and across classes *within* the Quaker communities.”⁵

These “testimonies” were developed very early on in Quaker history, and Friends took them along with them wherever they went. The Society of Friends originated in England, but Quakers, both fleeing persecution and dreaming of a spiritual utopia, very quickly founded outposts throughout the emerging British Empire and beyond. This book refers to Quakers in London, Germany, and Ireland as well as throughout the Americas. The first chapter, however, concentrates on the Quaker experience in seventeenth-century Barbados, while the remaining four chapters discuss the emergence of antislavery sentiment among Quakers in the communities that were established in and around the valley of the Delaware River in what are now the American states of Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The Barbadian experience was an essential precursor to the development of antislavery sentiment in the Delaware Valley, but it should be understood that Quakers faced a very different set of problems and opportunities in the two places.

Barbados is in many ways the classic plantation island. Indeed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was one of Britain’s most

valuable plantations. Claimed for King James I in 1625, and first settled by British colonists in 1627, the island rapidly became an important producer of tobacco, cotton, indigo, and sugar. There were African slaves in Barbados from its inception as a British colony, working alongside Native American slaves and servants, and white indentured servants, but in the earlier years they were a minority of the island's population. The transition of the island's economy almost exclusively to labor-intensive sugar production after 1640 led to a sharp increase in demand for workers. In part, this demand was met by white indentured servants, but the greatest increase in the island's population came from the importation of enslaved people taken from Africa. Estimates suggest that while the African population remained a minority into the 1650s, by the early 1670s Africans outnumbered Europeans by a ratio of three to two, and by three to one by the early eighteenth century. Barbadian planters soon developed a ruthless attitude toward their slaves, fueled by the ever-present fear of slave insurrection. An "Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes," passed in 1661 but amended and strengthened several times between then and 1688, required planters to provide slaves with the minimum in food, clothing, and accommodation, but granted slaveholders almost unlimited rights to beat, mutilate, or summarily execute their slaves. This was the notorious Barbados Slave Code. By the time the Quaker leaders George Fox and William Edmundson reached the island in 1671 (the visit is discussed in detail in Chapter 1), both slave and planter lived in a brutalized society dedicated to maximizing the profits of the European few without regard to the rights or happiness of the African majority.⁶

In the late seventeenth century, the population of the Quaker community on Barbados increased to over one thousand and created what Larry Gragg has called a "counter-culture" that "challenged the beliefs and practices of the dominant planter class." In the early eighteenth century, that population declined sharply and many of the island's Friends moved to Pennsylvania.⁷ On the face of it, the contrast with Barbados appears stark. While Barbadians lived in a society based on systematic violence, Pennsylvanians proclaimed themselves lovers of peace and named their capital The City of Brotherly Love. The reality did not quite live up to the hype, and early Pennsylvanians were in many

respects not far different from early Barbadians; indeed, many of Philadelphia's earliest residents had formally been settlers in Barbados. Quakers were not, of course, the first inhabitants of the region. The area that now encompasses southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey was originally settled by the Lenni Lenape, whom the British referred to as the Delaware Indians. Over time, European settlers deprived the Lenni Lenape of their lands, either by purchase and negotiation or by trickery and violence. The first of these settlers were from Holland and Sweden who alternately cooperated and fought over what were in fact very minor settlements near the confluence of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers. As was often the case with colonial America, European conflicts decided the future of the area. With the Treaty of Breda in 1667, Holland relinquished its claims over what are now the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, and the English became, in the eyes of Europeans, at least, the legal claimants to the region's considerable resources. The colony at New York was expanded, and new colonies founded in East and West Jersey, but by 1680 the strategically important peninsula between the Schuylkill and the Delaware was still only sparsely populated.

At this point, the English Quaker William Penn began to petition Charles II for a tract of land in the New World, a petition that was granted in March 1681—in part in repayment for a debt that the king owed Penn's father, and in part because the aristocratic Penn had both considerable talents at negotiation and, despite his Quaker beliefs, plenty of strings to pull at court. Agents were immediately sent to the Delaware Valley to secure the land and to begin work on the new town. Penn remained at home, framing the constitution and—equally importantly, since this was intended to be a profitable colony—writing advertisements to attract new settlers. In October 1682 Penn himself arrived at the construction site that was to be his city of Philadelphia in his colony of “Penn's Woods.” Over the coming few years, the city grew rapidly as settlers arrived from across northern Europe, often attracted by the colony's policy of religious toleration but just as often attracted by the opportunity for economic advancement. By 1700 the city had a population of approximately 2,500, and had passed 10,000 by the 1740s. It prospered although, despite the area's ample natural resources and its

surrounding high-quality agricultural land, it had few cash crops to sell to Europe. Before long, Philadelphians solved that problem by developing a system of trade with the British Caribbean colonies. In return for Pennsylvanian forestry and agricultural products, the Caribbean islands provided the hard cash, or the salable goods such as sugar, that allowed Philadelphia to buy manufactured goods from England. Thus, though not itself primarily a slave-plantation colony, Philadelphia's economy nevertheless depended in large measure on the wealth generated by slaves.⁸

Much has been written about the religious freedoms of early Pennsylvania, and much too has been said about the role of Quakers in the city's origin and development. The city was indeed founded by a Quaker, and Quakers were its most prominent citizens in its early years. In the late seventeenth century, Friends from across the New World, and from much of the Old, arrived in the city to take advantage of a place where they could worship and trade without fear of persecution. Thus, many of the early Quaker residents of Philadelphia brought with them expertise in colonial management learned in the slave-plantation societies of Jamaica, Barbados, and Carolina. Others, such as the mostly Dutch and German founders of the nearby village of Germantown, came from places where slavery, at least in its racialized form, was unknown. Not all settlers were Quakers, however, nor did Friends manage to hold on to undisputed power in the colony. A series of political disputes within the Quaker community, coupled with increasing inward migration from members of other groups, meant that Quaker influence in Philadelphia began to decline almost from the outset. By the early eighteenth century, Quakers were already a minority: a vocal and visible one, perhaps, but a minority nonetheless. The picture is complicated further since the power structures of early Pennsylvania did not map precisely onto the power structures of the Society of Friends. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the highest Quaker body in the region, received representatives from Quaker meetings in the colonies of East and West Jersey as well as from Pennsylvania. While Philadelphia was the cultural and political center of American Quakerism in the eighteenth century, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting—which sometimes met in West Jersey—was not precisely aligned with

the Pennsylvanian colonial assembly. Nor did it speak for other colonial yearly meetings in New England, Long Island, Virginia, South Carolina, Barbados, and elsewhere.⁹

Despite advocating tolerance and brotherly love, William Penn did not outlaw slavery in his colony. Slaveholding was common in early Pennsylvania and, although never on the scale of the Southern and Caribbean colonies, enslaved people probably made up around 10 percent of the population in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Members of all religious denominations held slaves, and Quakers were no exception. Most slaves were brought to Philadelphia in small groups on ships trading with the Caribbean and the Southern colonies; once in Philadelphia they would be set to work on a wide range of projects including, but not confined to, agricultural labor, domestic service, and the construction of new buildings in the growing town. Slaves, as well as free people of African origin or descent, were not invited to join in the civic culture of the new town although some Quakers did encourage segregated meetings for slaves. As with all slaveholding societies, discipline was harsh and could be brutal, and slave mobility was severely constrained. As Mary and Richard Dunn have noted: "in 1693, the Philadelphia authorities tried to prevent the tumultuous gathering of blacks on Sundays by ordering that any slave caught 'gadding abroad on the said first dayes of the week, without a tickett from their Master or Mistress' be publicly whipped with thirty-nine lashes—a tactic borrowed from the Barbados slave code rather than the spirit of brotherly love."¹⁰

It should also be noted that for much of this period Quaker views on the slavery of Africans were to some extent influenced by their relationships with the various groups of Native Americans that they encountered. Before 1700, Quaker writers in both Barbados and Pennsylvania distinguish between "blacks," "negroes," or "Africans" and "tawnies" or "Indians," but it is clear that they considered either group equally likely to be enslaved. In Barbados, most of the original Carib population of the island had been expelled or enslaved by Portuguese and Spanish settlers before the British arrived, while those that remained had been devastated by introduced European diseases. By the 1650s, when Quakers settled on the island, very few indigenous or imported

Indian slaves remained.¹¹ In Pennsylvania, the situation was more complex. The Lenni Lenape, who occupied much of modern New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, were a substantial presence. William Penn famously urged his colonists to maintain good relations with their Indian neighbors, and this rosy picture has passed into the mythology of early Pennsylvania. In reality, the relationship was strained, and it deteriorated as the eighteenth century progressed. The 1737 “Walking Purchase,” in which William Penn’s sons swindled the Lenape out of a swath of their homeland, was a notorious example of the contempt in which the colonists held the Indians. In 1756, the Pennsylvania Assembly declared war on the Lenape; this was one element of the crisis that caused Quakers to resign from government. Although this was a principled stand, we should not forget that Quaker settlement and expansion from the 1680s onward inevitably led to conflict with the original occupants of the land which they had colonized. Moreover, although the majority of the slaves held by Quakers were African, some buying and selling of Native American slaves was clearly taking place well into the eighteenth century since the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting felt it necessary to stipulate, in 1719, “that Friends do not buy or sell Indian slaves.” Further research is needed to establish the full extent of Quaker participation in the Indian slave trade. To judge from the antislavery debate considered in this book, however, it was most likely a marginal activity.¹²

A Note on Terms

This book is about the development of a discourse. It thus makes use of several terms whose meanings were not yet fixed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A number of terms used in this book remain ambiguous or even contested to this day. There are also some terms that are neither contested nor fluid, but which in this book are used in unfamiliar ways or in ways that are very specific to their context.

One group of words concerns slavery and its abolition. In the seventeenth century, the words “slave” and “servant” are often used interchangeably, but it is generally clear from the context whether the author

is referring to a paid servant or laborer or to a chattel slave. It is less clear in seventeenth-century texts whether either the word “slave” or “servant” refers to chattel slaves, normally Africans or Native Americans, or to indentured servants, normally Europeans. In these cases, the context should guide the way, but the reader should be alert to the possible ambiguity. By the early years of the eighteenth century, the terminology appears to have become more fixed, in Pennsylvania at least, so that the word “slave” almost always refers to a chattel slave, almost always a person of African origin or descent. In this book, the word “slave” designates any person who had been enslaved against that individual’s will and who, under the European legal systems of the day, would have been considered chattel, or salable goods. Thus, when “slaves” or “enslaved people” are discussed, this excludes indentured servants. Likewise, the phrase “the slave trade” refers primarily to the transatlantic trade in which captive Africans were taken to the Americas. Other slave trades did exist, including the Indian Ocean trade, the North African trade, the trade in enslaved Native Americans, and the business of transporting indentured servants and convicted felons. Where these are the subject of discussion, it is made clear in the text. Finally, I have used the term “African” to describe any black person of African birth or descent, whether free or enslaved. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in some modern British usage, the word “black” (whether capitalized or not) may also refer to people of Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, Australasian, or Polynesian origin or descent. In the eighteenth century, the word “African” was often used to describe not only people born in Africa, but also those of African descent born in Europe or the New World. To avoid any ambiguity, this is the convention I have adopted here.

Contemporary usage does not influence the use in this book of the terms “antislavery,” “abolition,” and “amelioration,” since none of these terms was in use before 1760, at least not in the context of slavery and the slave trade. The terms “abolition” and “abolitionist” are particularly vexed since they have very different meanings in the United Kingdom and the United States. In the former, an abolitionist was primarily a person working to outlaw the British Atlantic slave trade between 1787 and 1807. In the United States, abolitionism is more usually associated

with the campaign to end slavery from the 1830s to the 1860s. In the context of British colonies before 1760, neither usage is appropriate. "Abolitionism" and related terms are therefore used here to denote an active stance toward the abolition of either slavery or the slave trade rather than to indicate a connection with any formal movement. More often, the term "antislavery" is used to describe a broad set of attitudes skeptical of or hostile to either (or both) slavery and the slave trade. In the absence of a coherent antislavery movement in the first half of the eighteenth century, it is impossible to assign the term a fixed meaning. Nevertheless, it usefully encompasses a range of views and activities, and its precise sense is often made clearer by the context. Finally for this group of terms, the term "amelioration" is used to describe an approach to slavery increasingly common in the eighteenth century that claimed slavery was a necessary evil but recognized that it could and should be reformed to make it more humane. Some ameliorationist writing was genuinely humanitarian; some was a cynical attempt to undermine the activities of abolitionists. Again, the context should make this distinction clearer.¹³

A second group of terms describes the organization, institutions, customs, and activities of the Society of Friends. At first, members of the Society referred to each other as "Friends," while nonmembers spoke disparagingly of "Quakers." Friends quickly adopted the pejorative term and, since members of the Society now use both terms fairly interchangeably, so does this book, if only to avoid the monotony of frequent repetition. A Quaker place of worship is known as a "meeting house." (Rejecting the ostentation of spires, early Quakers referred to churches as "steeple houses.") A Quaker religious service is called a "meeting," but care should be taken to distinguish between "meetings for worship" and "meetings for business." The former are dedicated to spiritual matters and normally convene once or twice a week. The latter assemble less frequently and, as the name suggests, are concerned with the business, organization, and discipline of the Society. Monthly meetings generally encompass a small area or single community. Quarterly meetings are intermediate in both time and space and bring together representatives from neighboring monthly meetings. Yearly meetings are regional and represent the highest decision-making level within Quakerism

(although in the eighteenth century colonial yearly meetings tended to defer to the London Yearly Meeting in the final analysis). Meetings for business were segregated into men's meetings and women's meetings. In this book, almost all the meetings discussed are men's meetings for business.¹⁴ Quakers did not appoint or elect leaders, but they recognized that some Friends held authority by virtue of age, ability, or investment in the community. Such Friends were called "weighty," as were matters of great importance. Thus, while all Quakers regularly attended meetings for worship, only "weighty Friends" tended to be present at yearly meetings. At all meetings for business, decisions were (and still are) made by reaching a consensus, which Friends call "the sense of the meeting," rather than by taking a vote. When a particularly weighty matter was being discussed, it could take hours or even days to discern the sense of the meeting.

Two final terms require some explanation. These are "discourse" and "rhetoric." Both of these have simple meanings and extended meanings. The simple meaning of "discourse" is "conversation and exchange of opinion," while the simple meaning of "rhetoric" is "persuasive language." Both of these meanings are used in this book, and it should be clear from the context when a simple meaning is intended. In addition, however, both terms refer to more complex literary and linguistic theories. The word "discourse," in particular, is a key term which can be defined as "a set of shared and repeated statements about a subject." Linguists and discourse theorists will see this as an oversimplification, but it is not the intention here to offer a heavily theorized account of the development of a discourse of antislavery among Quakers. Nevertheless, this book does chart the movement from the seventeenth century, when individual Friends made isolated statements about slavery that were neither widely shared nor frequently repeated, to the mid-eighteenth century, when a set of statements about slavery is often repeated and almost universally shared within the Quaker community. Within this notion of discourse, the term "rhetoric" is also used. This is, of course, an ancient discipline, and usage of the term is guided by twenty-five centuries of tradition. Nevertheless, the parts of the Quaker discourse of antislavery which are referred to as "rhetoric" are the specific arguments and figures of speech used by antislavery Friends to convince others of

their point of view. Not all shared and repeated statements about slavery by Quakers are rhetorical in this sense, although most are. Likewise, not all rhetorical statements about slavery are shared and repeated—although even unrepeated rhetorical statements are almost certain to be informed by the discourses from which they emerge.¹⁵

Historiography and Critical Reception

Slavery and its abolition have been the objects of considerable scholarly inquiry for more than two hundred years. Scholars working in many disciplines have paid attention to the social, economic, and cultural histories and legacies of slavery, and within that body of literature there has been a general recognition of the role played by Quakers in hastening the end of the slave trade and, later, slavery itself. Inevitably, scholarly attention has been focused on the later period. Although brief discussion of Quaker attitudes to slavery before 1760 appears in many historical surveys, only a small number of historians have attempted detailed studies of the early Quaker experience of slavery. More surprisingly, given that evidence of the early Quaker debate over slavery is almost exclusively textual, literary critics have almost entirely overlooked Quaker engagements with slavery before 1760, other than to consider in isolation a few individual writers such as Alice Curwen or John Woolman. Close examination of the many brief discussions of early Quaker debates about slavery reveals that most derive wholly or in part from one or more of just a handful of texts, which are considered here.

Very little work has been published on the Quaker experience in Barbados. Indeed, the only substantial study appeared as recently as 2009. In *The Quaker Community on Barbados*, Larry Gragg has suggested that seventeenth-century Friends in Barbados created a “counter-culture” that challenged the planter class in several respects. Among these was slavery. “While they had not become true abolitionists,” Gragg argues, “the actions of Barbados Quakers towards slavery had made them truly a counter-cultural force on the island.” These actions included efforts “to convert their slaves, ameliorate their conditions, and, occasionally, to free them.” Gragg’s assessment of the Barbadian Quakers’

actions accords them greater agency in the development of antislavery thought than has previously been recognized. Gragg also explores the extent to which Barbados antislavery Quakers influenced Pennsylvania antislavery Quakers, showing that the legacy of the Barbados Quakers' relationship with slavery is a constant, if minor, theme in Pennsylvanian antislavery writing well into the eighteenth century. What is less clear from Gragg's study is the extent to which slave-owning Quakers from Barbados acted as a drag on the development of antislavery ideas in both Barbados and Philadelphia.¹⁶

Although it is important to understand the Barbadian context since, as Gragg shows, it informed later Quaker discussion of slavery, it should be stressed that almost all the crucial events in the early history of Quaker antislavery took place in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. For that reason, most historians who have approached the subject maintain a tight focus on that region. The earliest of these is Edward Raymond Turner's *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861* (1911). Turner's book, which was the result of extensive original archival research, located almost every source to which later scholars would turn. This archival work is not matched, however, by depth of analysis. His account of the origin and development of Quaker antislavery lacks detail, and his explanation for the rise of Quaker antislavery emphasizes the role of "great men," whose lives are revealed in documents "which bear witness of characters odd and heroic; which contain the story of men and women sincere, brave, and unfaltering, who united quiet mysticism with the zeal of a crusader." Turner argues that: "The wholesale private abolition of slavery by the Friends of Pennsylvania is one of those occurrences over which the historian may well linger. It was not delayed until slavery had become unprofitable, nor was it forced through any violent hostility. It was a result attained merely by calm, steady persuasion, and a disposition to obey the dictates of conscience unflinchingly. As such it is among the grandest examples of the triumph of principle and ideal righteousness over self-interest." The self-congratulatory tone seems dated today, but it was not unusual for the time. Historians on both sides of the Atlantic—white historians, that is—regularly praised abolitionists for their moral excellence while forgetting that European traders and settlers had created the

transatlantic slave trade in the first place. It is also interesting that Turner's assessment includes a challenge to Eric Williams's "decline thesis" thirty-five years before Williams argued that abolitionism took root only once slavery had become unprofitable. Turner's history is of its age, but it contains some valuable insights and an even more valuable record of the archives of early Quaker antislavery.¹⁷

The next substantial study of Quaker antislavery, which contains what is still in many ways the clearest and most complete narrative history of the Friends' early debates, was Thomas E. Drake's *Quakers and Slavery in America*, which appeared in 1950. Drake covers the period 1650–1860, so his material on the early period is concentrated into some earlier chapters. The narrative he sets out makes compelling reading because it is overtly teleological. Drake shows how Quaker antislavery began with early "voices crying in the wilderness" to grow into a "crusade against slavery [that] ended in 1865 with victory." Drake's explanation is simple. Quaker antislavery arose because of "the basic inconsistency between slaveholding and the Christian spirit." Despite this faith-based approach, however, Drake is not entirely closed to other, less metaphysical, explanations, and he shows a solid awareness of the social and political contexts of Quaker antislavery. His record of events is accurate, and his analysis is supported by notes and bibliographies so detailed and comprehensive that later scholars must always be indebted to him, whether they acknowledge it or not. Although clearly old-fashioned, *Quakers and Slavery in America* remains an important starting point.¹⁸

A little more than a decade later, Sydney V. James argued in *A People Among Peoples* that the development of antislavery thought could be explained in the context of what he called "Quaker Benevolence." James notes that, initially, Friends did not play a prominent role in what he calls "humanitarian concerns." Indeed, he argues, "the Society did not undertake projects to do good for outsiders until near the end of the eighteenth century, and did so at that time in circumstances which made it evident that their motives were not unalloyed humanitarianism." Since slaveholding "broke down the limitations of 'charity' to outsiders," James suggests, it prompted Friends to reassess what the duty of benevolence required. Antislavery was therefore part of a broader reengagement with the world in which "the humanitarianism of Friends became a lasting

feature of their church's operations and their outlook toward the world." To a certain extent, James's argument is convincing, but his emphasis on antislavery as a form of benevolence masks the extent to which Friends were themselves complicit in the brutality of slavery. Although considerably more sophisticated than preceding studies, James's analysis in many respects continues the tradition of celebrating Quaker antislavery as the triumph of moral men and the Christian spirit.¹⁹

A People Among People was published at a time when there was an enormous resurgence in interest in the history and cultures of slavery and abolition on both sides of the Atlantic. This intellectual movement was related to the very real struggles for freedom from colonization that African and Caribbean nations were undergoing at that time, as well as to the Civil Rights movement in the United States. One of the most important participants in this new debate about slavery and abolition was the cultural historian David Brion Davis. In *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, published in 1975, Davis introduced the memorable term "the Quaker Antislavery International" to describe the increasingly formalized international antislavery effort led by Friends from the 1770s onward.²⁰ It was, however, in his earlier work, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966), that Davis tackled the origins of abolitionist thought. The central plank of Davis's argument about Quakers is that "the key to the religious origins of antislavery thought is the idea of sin." The logic, which Davis sees first in the writing of William Edmundson in the 1670s, was that "Negroes were slaves to sin because they were slaves of men. From this position it was but a short step to the conclusion that slavery itself was sin." From this, and from similar conclusions reached by other Quakers, Davis charts the antislavery impulse as it was articulated by a number of Quaker authors such as John Hepburn, Elihu Coleman, Ralph Sandiford, and Benjamin Lay. He concludes that "by the mid-eighteenth century, Quakerism provided a cultural setting in which hostility to slavery could become something more than individual dissent." It did so in 1757, he argues, when Quakers were plunged into crisis over their response to the Seven Years' War, a crisis that prompted the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to strongly oppose slave-trading.²¹

Davis's analysis has stood the test of time in many ways, and most historians continue to accept 1757–8 as the key years when Quaker

antislavery sentiment solidified into firm commitment. Nevertheless, Davis's emphasis on printed antislavery texts means that he sees the development of a "cultural setting" hostile to slavery as being the business of a few eccentric individuals, and the texts which they produced as being largely without impact. Because he did not study the year-by-year minutes of Quaker meetings, he tends to overlook the many debates and myriad resolutions against slave-trading and slave-holding that became increasingly frequent from the 1690s onward. He thus emphasizes disconnectedness rather than continuity. This approach is reiterated in an important footnote in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, in which he critiques earlier accounts of the development of Quaker antislavery. "Most of these," he argues, "give the impression of an immanent unfolding of Quaker antislavery testimony, as if there were an unbroken continuity from George Fox to Anthony Benezet, and as if Quaker leaders simply waited until the time was ripe." To some extent this is a fair criticism of the teleological, often faith-based approaches of some historians. Although social and cultural conditions in Quaker Pennsylvania may have favored the development of antislavery, we must be clear that it was in no sense inevitable. Nevertheless, as this book shows, Quaker discussions about slavery were far more extensive and far more interconnected than a reading of the printed sources alone would suggest, while comparison of those printed sources reveals a much higher level of intertextuality than would be expected were their authors acting in isolation.²²

Interrogating the primary texts themselves allows us to establish myriad points of connection between them. Nevertheless, a notable feature of all the secondary texts so far considered is that they offered analyses of texts that were largely unavailable to their readers. Turner, Drake, James, and Davis all consulted primary and secondary material, printed and in manuscript, and reached conclusions from what they had read. None of them quotes more than a few lines from the material they had themselves examined. Even now that a large number of primary texts have been digitized, much of the material is unfamiliar or inaccessible. In the 1970s and earlier most of it would have been completely out of reach of anyone not resident in, or prepared to travel to, southeast Pennsylvania. In an attempt to rectify this, in 1980 J. William Frost

edited *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, an anthology of key texts prefaced by an extended and important introduction. These texts included not only facsimiles of books and pamphlets but also transcripts of minutes of many Quaker meetings where slavery was discussed. Frost's introduction attempted to use the texts to explain why Quakers were "the first collectively to endorse the idea that slavery was wrong and the first to move to free themselves from the taint of owning men." Frost does not offer clear conclusions, but instead suggests that the question is considerably more complex than many previous scholars had assumed. No single belief, procedure, influence, or event can on its own be held responsible for the origin of Quaker antislavery. Instead, Frost suggests that opposition to slavery was developed through the incremental adoption of "partial measures" in which "each measure became more stringent because previous advices had proven insufficient." Although none of these advances "appear particularly exciting or revolutionary" on their own, the sum of these decisions was that Quakers became "the first collectively to endorse the idea that slavery was wrong."²³

Frost's introduction ended the notion that there could be any single explanation for the development of Quaker antislavery. By making the primary texts more widely available the book should also have prompted new readings of the texts. This did not occur. Instead, the next major study of Pennsylvanian Quakers and slavery was a highly quantitative socioeconomic study of the ways in which "religious belief and economic interest interacted in the growth of abolitionism" among Friends in Philadelphia and its surrounding areas. By any measure, Jean Soderlund's *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (1985) was a substantial achievement. Like Frost, Soderlund concludes "that no single factor or circumstance accounts for the origins and growth of eighteenth-century Quaker abolitionism." Unlike Frost, however, who emphasized the intellectual and discursive influences on Pennsylvanian Friends' developing antislavery, Soderlund emphasizes the political and economic pressures that Quakers faced, while underestimating the cultural factors at play. Nevertheless, Soderlund's book still contains the most detailed and reliable economic and demographic data we have concerning slaveholding and antislavery in prerevolutionary Pennsylvania, and it is referred to frequently in this book. A few years later, Soderlund, in

collaboration with Gary Nash, extended her analysis of the end of slavery in Pennsylvania in *Freedom by Degrees* (1991). This considerably deepened our understanding of the socioeconomic context of the end of slavery in Pennsylvania, but, as with *Quakers and Slavery*, the book made few attempts to relate the history of slavery and abolition in Pennsylvania with broader cultural and intellectual currents in the Atlantic world.²⁴

The 1990s and 2000s were an exceptionally vibrant period for the study of slavery and abolition. Surprisingly, however, few scholars paid much attention either to the early development of antislavery thought or to the part Quakers played in it. References to early Quaker abolitionists such as Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet are plentiful but tend to be cursory. It was not until 2006, with the publication of Christopher Brown's *Moral Capital*, that a sustained attempt was made to place early Quaker antislavery into the broader context of "the foundations of British abolitionism." In common with most historians, Brown focuses on the period after 1760, but, in an important chapter, he explores the idea of an earlier "antislavery without abolitionism." Brown sees the 1772 Mansfield Decision in the case of James Somerset as a key moment in the crystallization of antislavery sentiment in England. In this celebrated case, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled that the runaway slave James Somerset could not legally be compelled to leave England and return to the plantations. Although this was not the end of slavery in English law, as many even at the time thought, it effectively ended slavery in England since slaves could simply, and legally, walk away. Nevertheless, although he sees this event as the turning point, Brown does not dismiss the existence or importance of earlier views. "An antislavery prejudice," he argues, "did percolate below the surface of Anglo-American culture between 1660 and 1760, even as the plantation economy expanded." Many people had reservations about slavery on religious or humanitarian grounds, Brown continues. "These reservations were real and substantial, but, on balance, they presented no real threat to the several interests aligned behind the slave system." While this statement is no doubt true on any immediately practical level, it is effectively a more sophisticated rephrasing of the common assessment that early antislavery writing had "little impact." Brown emphasizes this in relation to Pennsylvanian Friends when he

argues that “slaveholding became the subject of sustained debate among Quakers in the colonies only in the late 1750s.” *From Peace to Freedom* offers an alternative analysis, showing that a sustained debate over slaveholding in fact subsisted among colonial Quakers from at least the late seventeenth century. What had changed in the late 1750s was that antislavery Friends had won the debate and were able henceforth to begin and sustain a debate with others beyond the Society.²⁵

Two Questions: Why the Quakers and Why Philadelphia?

Christopher Brown demonstrates that as far back as the mid-seventeenth century, “antislavery prejudice” existed throughout the emerging British Empire as a vague and unfocused sense that an injustice was being done. From the outset, broadly antislavery writing was being produced by writers of all social classes, political leanings, and religious denominations throughout the new colonies as well as in the metropolis. Within this milieu, the Society of Friends emerged as the first organization to make antislavery a central plank of its corporate identity and, while Quakers everywhere were discussing slavery to some extent, it was in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that the most sustained and energetic conversation took place. It is natural to ask, therefore, what was peculiar about both Quakers and the Delaware Valley that antislavery sentiment should crystallize there before it did anywhere else. This question is important since, on the face of it, it was equally possible that antislavery discourse might cohere anywhere in the English-speaking world—or nowhere at all. This section attempts an answer, in part by briefly examining the attitudes toward slavery of other groups and in other places.

In the late seventeenth century, several publications by non-Quakers appeared which expressed views on slavery ranging from mild disquiet to outright hostility. In 1673, for example, the London-based Dissenter and prolific pamphleteer Richard Baxter offered “Directions to those Masters in foreign Plantation who have Negro’s and other Slaves.” Baxter accepted that slavery might be lawful when the enslaved were convicted criminals or taken captive in a legitimate war, but, for slaves obtained by other means, it was a “heynous sin to buy them, unless

it be in charity to deliver them." Even lawfully obtained slaves, he argued, may not "be denied such comforts of this life, as are needful to his cheerful serving of God in Love and Thankfulness." Thus, while Baxter can in no sense be described as an early voice of antislavery, he is clearly an early ameliorationist. In this, he is typical of many of the early commentators.²⁶ Unlike Baxter, Morgan Godwyn was an Anglican, but he takes a nearly identical line. As a vicar in Virginia between 1666 and 1670, and then in Barbados until 1680, he was well placed to observe the British colonists' treatment of the enslaved. After reading a pamphlet by the Quaker leader George Fox, he became convinced that it was the duty of the Anglican clergy in the colonies to educate enslaved people in the Christian religion, perhaps because he thought that if Anglicans did not, then dissenting Quakers would do so instead. *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, published after Godwyn's return to London in 1680, interweaves legal, theological, and scientific arguments to support his case that Africans are equal in humanity to Europeans. Godwyn argues that enslaved Africans in British colonies therefore have an equal right to spiritual care and humane treatment, but he does not suggest that slave trading should be ended or that slaveholding is inherently wrong. As is often pointed out, Godwyn's concern for the spiritual well-being of the enslaved was instrumental in the formation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), the Church of England's missionary society. The SPG did not, however, evolve into an antislavery organization. On the contrary, it became a slaveholder itself when in 1710 it inherited the Codrington Estate in Barbados.²⁷

The arguments of the Dissenting Baxter and the Anglican Godwyn were not substantially different from many of those made by Quakers in the late seventeenth century. Nevertheless, while Quakers would go on to affirm a corporate opposition to slavery, Anglicans and most Dissenters would not do so until long after Quakers had begun to publically agitate against slavery in the 1760s. This is despite both Dissenting and Anglican writers continuing to draw attention to slavery in various ways. In the last years of the seventeenth century, for instance, Puritans Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall advertised the iniquity of slavery to readers in Massachusetts. At the same time, Londoners were entertained by Aphra Behn's novel about the royal slave Oroonoko and

by Thomas Southerne's phenomenally successful stage adaptation of Behn's book. In the early eighteenth century, representations of slaves and slavery continued to trickle from the press, written by poets, novelists, dramatists, geographers, historians, natural philosophers, theologians, and politicians. Daniel Defoe appeared to criticize the slave trade in his poem *The Reformation of Manners: A Satyr* (1702), but he represents slavery as business-as-usual in his novels *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Captain Singleton* (1720). In the latter, the pirate Captain Bob is assisted in all his dubious dealings, including both legal and illegal slave trading, by William the Quaker, a complex and morally devious figure who, although guiding Captain Bob toward salvation, represented Quakers as hypocritical and opportunistic. This character type was not confined merely to literary representations of the Society of Friends. In Richard Steele's retelling of the Inkle and Yarico story in *The Spectator*, which achieved cult status, the fictional merchant Thomas Inkle's brutality in selling his Native American lover Yarico into slavery inspired poems, plays, and pictures across the eighteenth century. There is no suggestion that Inkle was a Quaker. Clearly, both colonial and metropolitan audiences beyond Quaker circles were interested in reading about and witnessing dramas about slaves and slave traders. Such audiences never grew proportionately large enough, however, for slavery to become a matter of sustained debate or public outrage.²⁸

As well as asking why Friends in Pennsylvania had developed a corporate antislavery ethos by 1760, therefore, we should consider the reasons why Dissenters or Anglicans had not. This question cannot be definitively answered here, but it must certainly be the case that the Church of England was both too vast and too closely connected with a government that was actively expanding its lucrative slave trade. The political and economic context alone would have ensured that Anglican organizations such as the SPG would receive little encouragement to speak out against either slave trading or slaveholding. Anglican culture and literature were so extensive and diverse that antislavery sentiment, when expressed, might not even come to the attention of most readers. The Church of England was not, therefore, fertile ground for the growth of antislavery discourse, nor would it ever be; Anglicans who adopted antislavery positions in the later eighteenth century were

commonly Methodists, Evangelicals, or members of other subsets of the established church.

It is less easy to explain why opposition to slavery did not crystallize in one or more of the many Dissenting churches other than the Society of Friends. The case of the Massachusetts Puritans is particularly puzzling since they occupied a colony that in society and economy more closely resembled Pennsylvania than either colony resembled Carolina, Barbados, or Great Britain. They also both had a history of discussion and condemnation of slavery. It is rarely possible to prove a negative hypothesis, and so we are unlikely to be able to state with certainty why antislavery did not emerge as a viable discourse among Massachusetts Puritans. It seems possible, however, that the organization of the Puritan churches, and the Congregational churches into which they evolved, was a key factor. Quaker organization was hierarchical, with local meetings answering to regional ones. Congregational churches, however, tended to have a more diffuse relationship with their neighbors and a stronger sense of local identity. Individual churches might indeed develop a strong antislavery ethos, but they would have less well-developed structures for communicating that sentiment to other communities. Just as important, they had much weaker structures for reaching a corporate position and for enforcing it. Antislavery sentiment might arise in any Congregationalist community at any time, but it would generally remain the business of the local church and community.

The internal structure of the Society of Friends must therefore be one of the factors that permitted the development of a corporate antislavery ethos. Although Quakers are often portrayed as egalitarian or even anarchic, they in fact worshipped within a society that was hierarchical, tightly knit, and well able to discipline members who broke its rules. Monthly meetings answered to quarterly meetings which in turn answered to yearly meetings. Although debates were settled by reaching the "sense of the meeting" rather than by formal democratic procedures, minutes of meetings show that order and precedence were usually followed, much business was briskly conducted by specially appointed subcommittees, and scrupulous notes and minutes were to be kept. Once a policy had been adopted by a yearly meeting, such as the approval

of the ban on dealing in slaves by the London Yearly Meeting in 1761, all Friends within the “verges” of that meeting were subject to the policy, and could be disowned for breaching it. To this we should add that there were a relatively small number of Friends, most of whom had a strong sense of group identification, which increased social pressure on Quakers to conform to the group identity while making it easier for recalcitrant Friends to be disowned by the society. Thus the group’s tight organization, hierarchical structure, and efficient bureaucracy ensured that once antislavery sentiment became the majority view, it could be translated into an enforceable antislavery policy in a way that was possible with few other religious groups.

The growth of antislavery sentiment among Quakers may also have been facilitated by their culture of debate and by their phenomenal networking skills. Minutes of meetings show that matters at all levels of importance were discussed both locally and at regional and national meetings. This was necessarily so since, although the various meetings were structured hierarchically, the Quakers had no appointed leaders and decisions were made by reaching the “sense of meeting.” This did not make meetings democratic in the way that we might understand that term now since the views of weighty Friends could take precedence over those of others, and no vote was taken. Nevertheless, debate was routine at meetings, and contrary voices could continue to be heard even when the majority was against them. Thus, although it took many years for opposition to slavery to become Quaker policy, there was in the meantime no ruling that said the matter could *not* be raised in meetings, even if at certain times such questions were discouraged. Accordingly, antislavery Friends did indeed continue to raise the issue.

Related to this culture of debate was the Quakers’ well-developed system of communication, which allowed ideas to spread rapidly within the society. With their strong sense of group identity and high levels of literacy, Friends took the trouble to visit one another, to write to each other frequently, and to read one another’s works. Itinerant Friends transmitted news and ideas between Quaker communities and encouraged different meetings to follow similar patterns, while the many Friends engaged in trade likewise transmitted ideas throughout the Quaker world.²⁹ Quaker writing was similarly homogenizing. The texts

display high levels of intertextuality, both as conscious quotation and unconscious allusion. The ideas and rhetorical structures found in Quaker antislavery texts are reworked and recycled constantly until they became familiar elements of Quaker discourse. It must be stressed that none of these factors made the rise of Quaker antislavery sentiment inevitable, but, taken together, the tight organization, congenial principles, culture of debate, and propensity to share ideas made the Society of Friends as fertile a ground for the consolidation of antislavery thought as any other setting in that period.

Structural factors may help us to understand why antislavery sentiment solidified into policy once it became widespread in the Society. We can also identify two related theological factors which Quakers found extremely difficult to reconcile with either slaveholding or slave trading. Like all Christians—indeed, like members of most religions—Friends recognized the Golden Rule, which specifies that we should treat others as we would wish them to treat us in similar circumstances. Unlike many other religious groups, however, the Society of Friends emphasized the rule very strongly as a fundamental guiding principle. As we shall see throughout this book, a central plank of Quaker antislavery argument from the start was that slavery infringed the Golden Rule since it was self-evident that we would not want to be enslaved ourselves. There were, of course, caveats and complications, such as the case of those who were enslaved in just wars or as punishment for crimes. As Christopher Densmore has pointed out, the Golden Rule could be a double-edged sword: “both sides could take comfort in advice like that: slave-owners because they fed, gave shelter, and employed their slaves; antislavery Friends because no reasonable person would want to be enslaved.” Such complications meant that the Golden Rule could not be used as absolute grounds for rejecting slavery. Nevertheless, it provided strong evidence against it, and even stronger evidence in favor of amelioration.³⁰

The Golden Rule was supported by the Quaker Peace Testimony. Quakers, famously, are pacifists, yet it was clear to many Friends that the slave system depended on violence at all its stages. As this book shows, antislavery Friends noted that many Africans were captured in unjust wars or were kidnapped violently. They recognized that enslaved

people in America were subject to arbitrary and cruel punishment. They argued that, since the constant threat of violence was necessary to prevent uprisings, slaveholding Quakers were thus forced to contravene the Peace Testimony. Taken together, the doctrine of the Golden Rule alongside the Peace Testimony made it easy for many Friends to turn their back on slavery, and difficult for slaveholding Friends to justify their practice.

If the Society of Friends was fertile ground, then we should also ask why Philadelphia and its surrounding communities should be the site of the most extended discussion of slavery within the Society. Again, there was nothing that made this inevitable. Other communities of Friends did indeed tackle the question during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. George Fox's letters (1698) and his ameliorationist *Gospel family-order* (1676) were printed in London, as were Thomas Tryon's antislavery tracts in 1684 and John Bell's *Epistle to Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Barbadoes, and the other colonies, and islands in the West-Indies* (1741). The London Yearly Meeting discussed the slave trade several times, for example, in 1713, when Pennsylvanian Quakers were told that "ye Importing [slaves] from their Native Country and Relations by ffrriends is not a Commendable nor allowed Practice," and again in 1727 when Quakers around the world were advised that slave trading was neither "commendable nor allowed." On the face of it this was strong advice. It was not enforced, however, and it was left to American Friends to continue the debate. This they did, and it is notable that the first Yearly Meeting officially both to sanction an antislavery pamphlet and to ban its members from slave trading was New England, not Philadelphia. Nevertheless, despite this early burst of activity, the New England Yearly Meeting did not appear to generate either extensive or extended debate about slavery. Their period of interest in the issue was relatively short and was prompted primarily by correspondence with London and Philadelphia. It began with their response to the London Yearly Meeting's advice of 1727, and shortly after led to the officially sanctioned publication of Elihu Coleman's antislavery tract of 1733. Ten years later, being sent John Bell's pamphlet from London, they asked their members to "refrain" from trading in slaves. Other than that, there is little evidence either of a prolonged debate or

that the advice was heeded. Visiting Newport in 1760, John Woolman was distressed to find “that a large number of slaves were imported from Africa and then on sale by a member of our Society.”³¹

When they turned their attention to it, first in 1713 and later in 1727, the London Yearly Meeting demonstrated that they did not believe slave trading to be in accordance with Quaker principles. In theory, this could have been the start of a sustained campaign, but it seems that the brief advice given that year did not reflect a groundswell of concern or opinion. Unlike Quakers in Philadelphia, those in London only rarely had their consciences tweaked by coming into direct contact with enslaved people while their attentions were divided by a wider range of issues than in Philadelphia. Possibly the most significant difference between the two places, however, was that in London Quakers were a tiny minority, far from the centers of political power and influence. New England Quakers were even more remote from power, and were in the minority in their colony as well. In Pennsylvania, by contrast, Friends were socially and politically dominant well into the eighteenth century. This, it would seem, was the crucial difference that permitted Pennsylvanian Friends to incrementally harden “antislavery prejudice” into a firm policy accompanied by a sophisticated rhetoric.

This point can be examined in a little more detail. There were, it seems, four factors that made the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting a more supportive environment for early antislavery Friends than either London or New England. The first was that Quakers in Pennsylvania came into daily contact with enslaved people without being economically dependent on their labor. Some Friends did keep slaves, but other options were available and Quakers who decided not to purchase slaves could find alternative labor sources. Second, there was a higher concentration of Quakers in Pennsylvania than anywhere else. As the minutes of meetings demonstrate, this greatly facilitated both the diversity and the intensity of debate relating to Quaker principles such as the Peace Testimony, but also allowed Friends to be constructively divided on key issues since they had less of a need to present a united front to the world. A third factor is that, at least in the early years of the colony, Friends were both the spiritual and the secular power in the land. Quakers dominated the colonial assembly well into the eighteenth century, even

after they had ceased to be the largest grouping in the colony. Confident that their principles mattered, and aware that what was decided as advice in the meeting house could well be translated into policy in the colonial assembly, early antislavery Friends saw a real opportunity to effect genuine change and thus worked harder to disseminate antislavery ideas than they might have done otherwise. Such thoughts no doubt motivated William Southeby when he petitioned the assembly in 1712 to emancipate the colony's slaves, an episode examined in detail in Chapter 3. Yet this confidence would not last. A final factor, long recognized by historians, is the withdrawal of the Quakers from colonial government in 1756 in protest over the Seven Years' War. Although Pennsylvanian Friends had already taken the decision to ban slave trading by then, the psychological shock of withdrawing from government seems to have led many Quakers to embrace antislavery as their new purpose and mission. As we see in Chapter 5, the sustained repetition of Quaker antislavery rhetoric over many years had already persuaded most Friends of the rectitude of outlawing involvement in the slave trade, but the new political reality meant that political will and community resources could be diverted into enforcing the advice against dealing in slaves. Together, over time, these four local factors combined with the more general structure and culture of the Society of Friends to make the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting a congenial forum for the development and hardening of antislavery thought.

Quaker Antislavery Rhetoric

The dozen or so printed antislavery texts that appeared in and around Philadelphia between 1688 and 1758, taken together with the many references to slavery that appear in records of Quaker debates and meetings in the colony, suggest that there is a more or less continuous debate taking place, the main participants in which are quite well aware of the arguments of their predecessors. As we have seen, historians have traditionally noted that antislavery publications appeared in the colony from time to time, but they have generally said that these publications were disconnected events, reflecting the interests and obsessions of

particular individuals or small cliques, and in general had “little impact.” Certainly, neither the British government nor the colonial assembly rushed to abolish the slave trade each time a Quaker antislavery pamphlet issued forth from the press. Nevertheless, sustained close reading shows that each of these pamphlets is feeding into the next and thereby fueling an ever-growing debate. This is repeatedly evident by the way that each pamphlet recycles arguments from its predecessors, reworks those arguments, and presents them again in an increasingly sophisticated form. Reading more closely, we see certain notable words and useful phrases being coined by earlier writers and picked up by later ones. Early Philadelphian antislavery texts are thus a model of intertextuality and provide clear evidence of the emergence, development, and consolidation of a coherent discourse of antislavery in the colony between 1688 and 1758. Far from having “little impact,” these texts impacted on each other and on their readers over several generations. They were a public arena where the substance and the rhetoric of the antislavery debate could be tested and refined. Antislavery texts emerged elsewhere, but for the most part they are only sporadically intertextual, neither arising from nor contributing to a developing discourse of antislavery.

By the late 1750s, therefore, when Anthony Benezet and John Woolman launched what David Brion Davis called the Quaker Antislavery International, Pennsylvanian Quakers had spent more than sixty years honing their arguments against slave trading and slaveholding. The texts that Benezet in particular presented to the world emerged from a discourse that had been formed in heated and sometimes acrimonious debate, but which owed just as much to both conscious and unconscious imitation and emulation. Crucially, Pennsylvanian antislavery discourse was influenced by the unique confluence of both spiritual and secular power in Pennsylvania, a key factor that very early hastened the development of a sophisticated rhetoric. This sophistication undoubtedly made the rhetoric more convincing to Quakers and non-Quakers alike when it was taken to the wider world after 1758. Important too was the fact that the rhetoric had been tested in genuine debate over generations. Successful arguments and tropes had flourished and multiplied. Unsuccessful ones had withered and died. The new

species of antislavery rhetoric that evolved in the meeting houses of the Delaware Valley was at first endemic only to that specialized intellectual environment. When introduced to the wider world by Woolman and Benezet, it would prove to be hardy and vigorous, spreading rapidly throughout the English-speaking world and beyond. Although in 1758 virtually no one outside of the Society of Friends was aware of it, Quakers in Philadelphia had already developed, tested, and refined a sophisticated rhetoric of antislavery that was now available for the entire world.

The fine detail of this rhetoric will be revealed in the close readings of texts that constitute the bulk of this book. Nevertheless, some key features can be identified. As we have seen, slavery violated two central Quaker principles: adherence to the Golden Rule and to the Peace Testimony. Accordingly, much Quaker antislavery rhetoric can be traced back to those two principles. Man-stealing is proscribed in the Old Testament, for instance, and this scriptural authority is frequently cited, but kidnapping as a source of slaves is more often criticized because it is violent and because we would not ourselves wish to be kidnapped. Nevertheless, the Golden Rule and the Peace Testimony did not provide the only arguments against slavery. Initially, much energy was expended proving that Africans were spiritually equal with Europeans. We should be clear that few, if any, Quakers argued that Africans were the social equals of Europeans, but spiritual equality placed upon slaveholders the duty of educating enslaved people in the Christian religion, and this, combined with Quaker arguments about violence, is a central plank of ameliorative approaches to slavery that emphasized that while slave trading was immoral, reformed slaveholding might be acceptable. Another prominent group of arguments was more self-interested. In addition to being violent and against the Golden Rule, slaveholding was sinful for many reasons: because it involved the theft of another's labor, because it encouraged greed, sloth, and vanity, or because it encouraged enslaved people to sin—by separating husbands and wives, for example, who might then practice fornication and adultery. Friends who wanted to ensure a safe passage to heaven were thus warned that slaveholding put their own souls in mortal peril. The problem of sin was not the only self-interested argument against slavery. Quaker antislavery rhetoric frequently proclaims that the colony and the Society will prosper without

slaves and might face economic ruin with them, or that the risk of slave uprisings outweighs the economic benefit to the community.³²

Such pragmatic arguments against slavery are perhaps one reason why Quaker antislavery rhetoric steadily gained ground throughout the first half of the eighteenth century and became widespread beyond Quaker circles in the second half. This book charts the early development of this rhetoric in considerable detail, from the Friends' first sustained debates about slavery in Barbados in the 1670s, to the moment at the end of the 1750s in Philadelphia, and the start of the 1760s in London, when Quakers officially turned their back on the slave trade. In 1761, the London Yearly Meeting agreed to "recommend it earnestly to the care of Friends every where to discourage as much as in them lies a practice so repugnant to our Christian profession and to deal with all such as shall persevere in a Conduct so reproachful to the Society & disown them if they desist not therefrom."³³ This did not mark the end of either slavery or the slave trade. It did not even signal the immediate end of Quaker involvement in the Atlantic slave system. What it did mark was, for the first time, the formal adoption of an antislavery ethos, supported by a tried and tested antislavery rhetoric, by an organization large enough to put that rhetoric into the wider public sphere. That alone makes 1761 a crucial year in the early history of the movement to abolish slavery and the slave trade. Once Quakers had adopted antislavery as an internal doctrine, they were then able to work on convincing the wider world of the rectitude of their position. After 1761, antislavery Quakers become increasingly active, writing public tracts and pamphlets and agitating behind the scenes with letters to prominent people and meetings with leaders of other denominations. Eventually, Quakers were instrumental in founding the first antislavery societies: the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, founded in Philadelphia in 1775, and the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, launched in London in 1787. The history of these societies has been often told and will not be repeated here. Instead, *From Peace to Freedom* shows that the origins of most of the arguments made in the formalized antislavery campaigns that emerged from the 1770s onward can be found throughout writings produced by Friends in the century-long debate that took place from 1657 to 1761.

*From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the
Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761*

This book is divided into five chapters, each of which considers a recognizably distinct phase of the development of a Quaker discourse of antislavery. Chapter 1 examines the records of the very earliest Quaker encounters with slavery, focusing on the controversy that took place when Quaker leaders were brought into conflict with the colonial authorities in the island of Barbados. Opening with a reading of an important letter on slavery written in 1657 by the founder of Quakerism, George Fox, it then examines in detail Fox's later writings on slavery during and after his visit to Barbados in 1671. The final sections consider the attitudes toward slavery of Fox's contemporaries William Edmundson and Alice Curwen, both Quakers and both active on Barbados in the mid-1670s. Throughout, Chapter 1 shows that while slavery could not easily be reconciled with Quaker thought, and that while none of the early Quakers, with the possible exception of Curwen, could perceive that it could or should be abolished, early Quaker writing on slavery nevertheless created opportunities for later discussion, particularly after many Barbados Quakers moved to Pennsylvania.

In Chapter 2, the scene moves from Barbados to the Quaker communities of the Delaware Valley, where slavery became a matter of debate among Quakers in the closing years of the seventeenth century. The chapter, like the debate, opens with an assessment of the now celebrated 1688 Germantown Protest against slavery. It demonstrates that the Protest had an immediate and important afterlife, leaving significant discursive traces in the antislavery pamphlet written by the supporters of the schismatic Quaker George Keith and in antislavery letters written by Cadwalader Morgan and Robert Pile. In the debate that ensued, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting urged Friends not to buy imported slaves. The chapter concludes that, by the end of the seventeenth century, Quakers in the Delaware Valley had established a coherent and reasonably consistent set of rhetorical maneuvers that could be used to argue against slavery and the slave trade.

Chapter 3 examines the ways in which the slavery debate resurfaced in the second decade of the eighteenth century. It commences

with discussion of legislation, passed by the Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania Assembly in 1712, which levied punitive duties on the importation of slaves, matched in 1713 by unexpectedly strong advice from London that importing African slaves was neither “Commendable nor allowed.” Arguably, this officially prohibited Quakers everywhere from participating in the slave trade. Close reading of the remaining traces of the debate, however, reveals that public demonstrations of antislavery sentiment may well have masked cynical attempts to silence antislavery friends while maintaining the illusion of taking them seriously. The chapter next discusses the important work of the New Jersey Quaker John Hepburn, whose *The American defence of the Christian Golden Rule*, published in 1714, was the first substantial Quaker antislavery text, before concluding with a brief look at the ways in which antislavery sentiment was articulated in the last years of the 1710s. It shows that, although the debates of the decade had resulted only in an uneasy compromise, antislavery rhetoric had now been heard by Quaker communities on both sides of the Atlantic, with the result that a public discourse of antislavery, although perhaps reflecting the view of only a minority, had become established throughout the global Quaker community.

Chapter 4 explores both the discursive processes and, to a certain extent, the political processes, by which Friends in the Delaware Valley moved from the messy compromise of 1716–19 to an even less stable settlement in 1743 in which antislavery was enshrined in Quaker ritual but without the power of positive sanction. The central part of the chapter, however, consists of critical readings of two important antislavery texts of the 1720s and '30s: Ralph Sandiford's *A brief examination of the practise of the times* (1729) and Benjamin Lay's *All slave-keepers, that keep the innocent in bondage, apostates* (1737). Although both of these are often represented as lying out of the mainstream of Quaker antislavery thought, Chapter 4 argues that both texts clearly emerge from the increasingly sophisticated discourse of antislavery that was being articulated in private homes as well as in meeting houses and which had become a mainstream Quaker concern by the start of the 1740s. The chapter concludes by showing how the Quaker discourse of antislavery became embedded within the Queries: a central ritual of the Society of Friends.

The final chapter concentrates on the texts and arguments that finally convinced Quakers in Philadelphia and London to put in place an enforceable ban on Friends participating in the slave trade, a process that took place between 1753 and 1761. It focuses on John Woolman's *Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes* (1754), the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Epistle of caution and advice, concerning the buying and keeping of slaves* (1754), and Anthony Benezet's *Observations on the enslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes* (1759). It argues that these texts were relatively brief because they were intended not to persuade the unconvinced but, instead, to motivate a new generation of antislavery Friends to action. The chapter, and the book, concludes by assessing the impact of the North American discussion in England, and shows how debate in Philadelphia prompted change in London. Although in 1761 few people beyond the Society of Friends either knew or cared that Quakers were now not allowed to purchase slaves, over the previous century Friends had practiced and refined a discourse of antislavery—a discourse which was now available for incorporation into the wider English language. Within a short period of time, antislavery sentiment accordingly began to enter the mainstream of British political debate.

CHAPTER ONE

“The power that giveth liberty and freedom”

BARBADOS, 1657–76

QUAKER WRITING ON SLAVERY BEGAN in 1657 with a letter from England addressed to “Friends beyond sea.” The letter’s author was George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, and the ideas he tentatively expressed were challenged, revised, and finally reasserted by Fox himself in the light of his own personal experience on the plantation island of Barbados. As the words of the founder, Fox’s writings on slavery would later assume an importance to Quakers that perhaps outweighed what their actual length or content merited. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that they would influence the thinking of the many Quakers who would question the morality and legitimacy of slavery over the coming centuries. More immediately, Fox stirred up a controversy in Barbados that remained in the Quaker collective memory for years at a time when many of the island’s Friends were relocating to the colonies of the Delaware Valley. To understand the development of antislavery in the Quaker communities within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting we must thus understand the events that shaped Fox’s response to slavery. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter examines Fox’s 1657 letter in detail, while the following two sections chart Fox’s later writings on slavery during and after his visit to Barbados, paying attention both to their content and to their form and style. The final sections of this chapter examine the attitudes toward slavery of Fox’s

contemporaries William Edmundson and Alice Curwen, both Quakers and both active on Barbados in the mid-1670s.

George Fox Writes to Friends Beyond Sea

George Fox's career can be viewed against the backdrop of the English Civil War and its aftermath. By the time he arrived in Barbados in 1671, he had spent years traveling, first as he grappled with his faith, next to disseminate his views, and later to develop the organization of the newly formed Society of Friends. In that time he had suffered persecution and had been imprisoned on several occasions. He was once released at the request of Parliament, and once at the request of Oliver Cromwell, who, admittedly, had ordered him to be arrested in the first place. Whether or not his personal experience of imprisonment influenced his attitude toward slavery is impossible to say. It was nevertheless during this period that he first turned his attention to slavery in the short letter of 1657 titled "To Friends beyond sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves." This letter, one of the first meaningful ameliorative texts in the English language, is also an important document of the new international phase into which the Society of Friends entered in the 1650s. The first Quakers to settle in the Americas reached the continent in 1656, part of a rapid migration of Quakers to take place over the coming few years. Given the length of time it took news to cross the Atlantic, the letter's date demonstrates both that Quakers were buying slaves from the outset of their settlement in America and that Fox must have come to a rapid view of the practice once it had come to his attention.¹ Fox wrote:

Dear *Friends*, I was moved to write these things to you in all those *Plantations*. *God*, that made the World, and all things therein, and giveth *Life* and *Breath* to all, and they all have their *Life* and *Moving*, and their *Being* in him, he is the *God* of the *Spirits* of all *Flesh*, and is no *Respecter* of *Persons*; but *Whosoever* feareth him, and *worketh Righteousness*, is *accepted* of him. And he hath made all *Nations* of *one Blood* to dwell upon the Face of the Earth, and his *Eyes* are over all

the *Works* of his *Hands*, and seeth every thing that is done under the whole *Heavens*; and the *Earth is the Lord's and the Fullness thereof*. And he causeth the *Rain* to fall upon the *Just* and upon the *Unjust*, and also he causeth the *Sun* to shine upon the *Just* and the *Unjust*; and he commands to *love all Men*, for Christ loved all, so that he *died for Sinners*. And this is *God's Love* to the *World*, in giving his *Son into the World*; *that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish*. And he doth *Enlighten every Man, that cometh into the World*, that they might believe in the *Son*. And the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under *Heaven*; which is the *Power*, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*, and is *Glad Tidings* to every *Captivated Creature* under the whole *Heavens*. And the *Word of God* is in the *Heart* and *Mouth*, to obey and do it, and not for them to *ascend* or *descend* for it; and this is the *Word of Faith*, which was and is preached. For *Christ* is given for a *Covenant* to the *People*, and a *Light* to the *Gentiles*, and to enlighten them; who is the *Glory of Israel*, and *God's Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*. And so, ye are to have the *Mind of Christ*, and to be *Merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful*.²

Beyond the title and the first line, there is little indication that Fox has slavery in mind. Many of his arguments are relevant to other situations, and could have been applied to Friends' relationships with a range of other groups and individuals. Nevertheless, the title and opening lines are rhetorically effective. They offer the reader an ostensibly narrow and contingent set of circumstances, but then provide evidence to show that the topic is universal in scope. This universalizing is an important part of the message. Drawing on Acts 17:26, Fox argues that God, who "hath made all *Nations of one Blood*," has created only one human family, all members of which are equal both before God and within his creation—that is, both in Heaven and on Earth. This inclusiveness is strengthened by repetition. The word "all" occurs nine times in the first four sentences, and the words "every" and "whole" appear frequently in the rest of the letter. Repetition is a rhetorical technique that we would expect to find in a work created by a man used to preaching to crowds;

it also enhances the sense that the precepts of the letter apply equally to all human beings, without exception. This powerful argument is thus both cogently expressed in Fox's scriptural argument and structured into the form and language of the letter itself.³

While the letter clearly asserts the equality of human souls, it is far from being a call to emancipate slaves. The key sentence argues that “the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*, and is *Glad Tidings* to every *Captivated Creature* under the whole Heavens.” In other words, the Gospel is available to all, and brings joy to captives, slaves included. While this is reasonably unambiguous, and even relatively uncontentious, the same cannot be said of the assertion that the Gospel “*giveth liberty and freedom*.” There are two possible interpretations of this. The first is that the word of God brings spiritual liberty to the individual, freeing them from the burden of sin. This type of spiritual liberty might indeed be “*Glad Tidings*” to captives bearing the weight of their transgressions. A second interpretation, and a far more radical one, is that a true understanding of the Gospel confers freedom on the “captivated.” If this is the case, then captives of all sorts might walk free once they have embraced the light. Although there is little evidence that this second meaning is the one that Fox himself had in mind, it would not stop others in the future from adopting and acting on this more radical view. In either case, in this letter Fox very early on emphasized to Quakers in the colonies the idea that all humans were equally capable of and deserving of receiving the light. More practically, he reminded colonial Quakers that, just as “the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under Heaven” so too “ye are to have the *Mind of Christ*, and to be *Merciful*.” In the 1650s, neither of these things were obvious in the minds of most of the Europeans who encountered enslaved Africans and Native Americans.

George Fox in Barbados

If slavery troubled George Fox between 1657 and 1671, he left no evidence of it. Larry Gragg speculates that the turning point came late in 1671 when Fox lay seriously ill at Thomas Rous's plantation in Barbados,

which was worked by a population of more than a hundred slaves. Fox visited Barbados and the British North American colonies between 1671 and 1673 as one of a group of Quakers which included Solomon Eccles, William Edmundson, John Hull, John Stubbs, and several others, many of whom are well known to scholars of early Quakerism. As Gragg suggests, Fox's personal experience transformed his understanding of slavery, but it would also bring him into conflict with the planters of Barbados. This conflict gave rise to a group of letters and pamphlets in which we can see Fox striving to reach a position on slavery which was compatible with both Quaker principles and the political realities of Barbados society. This section examines the text of these writings, which together shaped the early Quaker response to slavery.⁴

Fox's journal is incomplete for this period, but a partial narrative of the visit has been reconstructed by John Nickalls, working from letters and other documents written by Fox and his party during the expedition.⁵ Despite arriving in poor health, Fox soon recovered enough to hold "many and great meetings among the whites and blacks" of Barbados. According to John Stubbs, in a letter written in December 1671, "the truth is freely preached, both to white people and black people. Solomon [Eccles] and I have had several meetings among the negroes in several plantations, and it's like must have more yet." Stubbs's description suggests that these meetings were racially segregated, but it says little about what was said there, or what the slaves made of Quaker rhetoric and theology. The barest hint of that is offered by John Hull, in a letter written the previous month, in which he argues that "the Lord hath and will make him a choice instrument in his hand for much good unto them, even unto the blacks as unto the whites, for the blacks (as 'tis said) expect some good by his coming here." Clearly, Fox's visit was being discussed among the enslaved population of the island, and being viewed in some sort of positive light. Although we will never know precisely what "good" the island's slaves expected of the visit, we do know that many of the Anglican plantocracy felt that Quakers were encouraging a general uprising. We know this since Fox felt a need to refute that allegation in a letter "For the Governour and his Council & Assembly . . . in this island," which concludes with an important engagement with the problem of slavery on Barbados.

The letter, which was probably a collaborative effort, starts in combative mood, noting the “many Scandalous Lyes and Slanders” that have been leveled against Quakers, among which are the allegations that Quakers “*do deny God, and Christ Jesus, and the Scriptures of Truth.*” These were serious accusations. For the first three pages of this letter, therefore, Fox presents the aspects of Quaker belief that were broadly in line with orthodox Anglicanism. Echoing the language of the *Book of Common Prayer*, Fox asserts that Quakers believe Jesus Christ “was Conceived by the Holy Ghost, and Born of the Virgin *Mary* . . . was Crucified for us in the Flesh, without the Gates of *Jerusalem*; and that he was Buried, and Rose again the Third Day, by his own Power, for our Justification; and we do believe, that he Ascended up into Heaven, and now sitteth at the Right-Hand of God.” Barbados cannot be described as a notable center of Anglicanism in the late seventeenth century. As Gragg has shown, church attendance was low while most clergy who came to the island primarily “expected to improve their fortunes.” The strength of the attacks made on Quakers in Barbados, and the vigor with which Fox defended his faith, must therefore have had more to do with the social and economic ambitions of the island’s plantocracy than with their excessive piety. Accordingly, Fox’s letter takes two distinct rhetorical approaches. The first, asserting the closeness of Anglican and Quaker theology, can be seen as an attempt to ingratiate Friends with the island’s Anglican elite by appealing to their sense of what was known, familiar, and presumably nonthreatening. The second approach, found in the final two pages of the letter, is more solidly grounded in the economic base of the conflict between Quakers and Anglicans. Here, Fox retains the defensive tone that characterizes much of this letter, but abruptly changes direction. He notes that “another Slander and Lye they have cast upon us, is; namely, *That we should teach the Negars to Rebel.*” Fox had surely reached the bottom line. The colony of Barbados was a commercial enterprise, and the majority of the plantocracy had concluded that profits depended on a subservient, brutalized, and emphatically nonevangelized labor force. By contrast, Fox’s Quakers had from the start been asked to recognize that “the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*, and is *Glad Tidings* to every *Captivated Creature* under the whole Heavens.” While the

emphasis on liberty must always have been seen by Barbados Quakers as metaphorical, the emphasis on preaching the Gospel to "every creature" had not been seen in that way. Throughout the 1660s, Friends had offered religious instruction to the enslaved and, in 1671, Fox himself preached to slaves, as a lengthy "Addition" to this letter attests. Although, as Gragg has shown, few of the enslaved did in fact convert, clearly the planters felt threatened by Quaker attempts at conversion and put about the rumor that Friends taught the slaves "to rebel."⁶

Fox's response to this precise accusation has a threefold rhetorical structure, moving from outraged refutation, through justification of his broader policy concerning slavery, to encouragement to the island's Quakers to extend their ministry. He begins by refuting the "slander." Teaching the slaves to rebel is "A thing we do utterly *abhor* and *detest* in and from our Hearts, the Lord knows it, who is the Searcher of all hearts, and knows all things; and so can witness and testifie for us, that this is a most Egregious and Abominable Untruth." This strong refutation is rhetorically powerful in its use of repeated words and sounds, its deployment of emphatic tautologies such as "abhor and detest," and its powerful underlying rhythms; like much early Quaker antislavery rhetoric, either the text is written for oral delivery, or it is strongly influenced by the forms of spoken oratory. The loud protestations of innocence over, Fox seeks to clarify to "the Governour and his Council & Assembly" what has really been taking place in Quaker meetings at which enslaved people were present:

For, that which we have spoken and declared to them is, to exhort and admonish them, *To be Sober and to Fear God, and to love their Masters and Mistresses, and to be Faithful and Diligent in their Masters Service and Business; and that then their Masters and Overseers will Love them, and deal Kindly and Gently with them. . . . And that they do not Steal, nor be Drunk, nor commit Adultery, nor Fornication, nor Curse, nor Swear, nor Lye . . .* that there are but two Ways; the one, that leads to Heaven, where the Righteous go; & the other, that leads to Hell, where the Wicked and Debaucht, Whoremongers and Adulteres, Murderers, Lyars & Thieves go.

On the surface, Fox's hyperbolic rhetoric seems typical of an enthusiastic Christian preacher. Beneath the surface, however, Fox is offering a hardheaded contract: if the slaves behave well, and work hard, they will be treated well. The quid pro quo is that masters and overseers are expected to "deal Kindly and Gently" with those slaves who are "Faithful and Diligent." One wonders how seriously either the planters or the enslaved of Barbados took this piece of advice, if it was indeed proffered at the Quaker meetings where slaves were invited. While this sort of relationship may have existed on some Quaker plantations, most planters were not Quakers, and slaves would have been able to see plainly enough that the majority of planters did not follow such reciprocal agreements with their slaves, nor did they, in many cases, refrain from debauchery, adultery, and murder. Indeed, seventeenth-century Barbados society was growing increasingly brutal and, between 1661 and 1688, the absolute dominion of a planter over his slaves was being codified in island law. Fox's offer of a plantation contract clearly runs counter to the spirit of the Barbados Slave Code and to some extent can be viewed as an alternative to it. Whatever actually went on in Quaker meetings, in this letter written to "the Governour and his Council & Assembly, and all others in power," the idea of a plantation contract based around the mutual good behavior of planter and slave seems proposed as a measure ideally to be adopted by the largely Anglican plantocracy, and it is they who appear to be the ones being reminded of the wages of sin, and of the promise of life everlasting. In effect, this section is less of a defense of Quaker practices and more of a challenge to Anglican practices.

If Fox was addressing the Anglican plantocracy in this paragraph, his next is more explicitly addressed to Quakers. Having reached a crescendo of fulmination against vice, he switches to a more personal and confiding register as he moves the scene of his oratory from the public realm of the plantation to the private realm of the family. In the seventeenth century, the boundaries of the family were drawn more widely than they are today and encompassed the head of the family, his wife and children, their servants, and—in Fox's view at least—their slaves. "Now consider, Friends," he begins, "that its no Transgression, for a Master of a Family to instruct his Family himself, or else, some other

in his behalf; but rather, that it is a very great Duty lying incumbent upon them." Despite its title and opening paragraphs being explicitly addressed to those "in power," with its appeal to "Friends," the letter now seems directed toward his own congregation. Invoking the biblical examples of Joshua and Abraham, Fox reminds Friends that it is the "Command of the Lord" that heads of households, like Abraham and Joshua, "have a Duty lying upon us, to Pray and to Teach, Instruct and Admonish those in and belonging to our Families." This established, he slips in something more controversial, arguing that "*Negars & Tawny Indians* make up a very great part of *Families* in this Island, for whom an Account will be required at the Great Day of Judgement, when every one shall be Rewarded according to his Deeds done in the Body, whether they be good, or whether they be Evil." The crucial point is that Fox understood a plantation to be a household and not a manufactory. Fox's plantation is subject to the same rules of household management that were laid down in the Biblical texts he cites, and a failure to obey these rules leaves the head of the household open to the displeasure of eternal justice. Fox does not say that at Judgment Day, God will require an account *from* servants and slaves. Instead, he mentions the "*Negars & Tawny Indians* . . . for whom an Account will be required." In other words, at the last day, slave owners will be held to account *for* the spiritual failures of their slaves and "will incur the Lord's Displeasure" for not having instructed their household to call upon the name of the Lord. Fox's text, Jeremiah 10:25, is specific on the point: Jeremiah asks the Lord to "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name." In a pattern that would be repeated many times over the coming century, Fox's analysis seems ultimately more concerned with the spiritual well-being of the enslavers than the enslaved. Nevertheless, Fox's insistence that slaves are part of the family is a key innovation that would guide both his own response to slavery and the response of Quakers for decades to come.

Scholars of Quakerism have usually been more interested in the first part of the letter's utility as a statement of Quaker belief rather than in its concluding thoughts on slavery. Rufus M. Jones and Howard Brinton have noted that it is "frequently reprinted as an authoritative document" and that "it has occasionally been used as a creed by some

bodies of Friends.” They have also both drawn attention to its heterogeneous structure and variable style. Jones has argued that “the letter is a patchwork of phrases. It lacks organism and structure. It is flat and uninspired. It has no quality of style, no touch of genius. There is no throb or palpitation behind it. It is just words.” Brinton noted that it “seems to have been prepared by members of the group” and cannot, therefore, be seen as the unadulterated views of George Fox. Such considerations may be important to those examining Fox’s particular role in the evolution of Quaker doctrine. To the scholar of abolitionism, however, evidence showing that the letter was drawn up by a committee suggests that the antislavery impulse was not merely a personal whim of Fox’s but was an emerging discourse arising from debate and discussion within a group of people. From the start we see that Quaker antislavery, even in its most rudimentary forms, was not simply an idea in need of dissemination but was instead a discourse in development, both shaping and being shaped by unfolding events.⁷

The sense that an emerging discourse of antislavery was having one of its first public airings in Barbados is reinforced by the long “Addition” to the letter which was added to the published edition, and which extends both the theological arguments and the arguments about slavery. It is not clear when the “Addition” was composed, but it seems likely that it was added after Fox had left Barbados, not least because it refers to “G.F.” in the third person in several places. It is thus almost certainly not his work, providing evidence that the arguments that he prompted remained a part of public discourse in Barbados for at least a short time after he left. Stylistically, it is a little more complex than the main letter, and certainly more so than much of Fox’s writing. The opening is more ornate and syntactically balanced than Fox’s generally blunter writing style, but it makes a similar point to the main letter when it argues that “whereas divers Reproachful Speeches, by some of the Priests and People of the Island of *Barbadoes*, were cast upon *George Fox*, since his arrival here, its manifest that the *Devil* was the Author of them.” A half-dozen pages of theological argument follow before the author or authors address the allegation that Quakers encouraged slaves to rebel “because that G.F. and some Masters of Families, had some Meetings with the *Negars* belonging to friends.” The authors initially

take the same approach as Fox, protesting that Quakers only instructed slaves to “*Serve and Worship the Lord God in Spirit and in Truth, and yield subjection to their Masters,*” but they diverge sharply by producing an example, and by drawing a moral from it, that strongly reinforces the spiritually egalitarian views in Fox’s 1657 letter:

Its credibly reported that once when a *Black* came to a Steeple-House in time of worship, That the Sexton came to him with his Whip, and said unto him, *Get thee out thou Dog; what do you here?* are these the words of Christ? for sure *the Lord Would have all to be saved:* And have you no Gospel for *Blacks?* is not the Gospel to be preached to all Nations and peoples? and are not the *Blacks* of some Nations and peoples? did not Christ dye for the *Blacks* and the *Taunies*, as well for the *Whites?*⁸

The story—one might almost call it a parable—does not seem likely to have done much to placate the feelings of the Anglican plantocracy on the island. Nevertheless, it ties in with a long tradition of anti-clericalism in Dissenting rhetoric. In this, it reaches further back than the Reformation. The story alludes to the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, which, with its expression of compassion for an outsider, may have resonated particularly strongly with members of a marginalized sect such as the Quakers. In the biblical parable, “a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:30–37). The sexton in the Quaker story is like the priest in the biblical parable. He refuses to offer help to his neighbor because he does not accept that an African slave can possibly be his neighbor; he breaks the Golden Rule because he does not recognize that Christ died “for the *Blacks* and the *Taunies*, as well for the *Whites.*” This is one of the earliest colonial recastings of the Good Samaritan parable but it is far from being the last. Here, it is a forceful statement both of the disgust many Quakers felt for what they perceived was Anglican hypocrisy, but also for the obvious double standard that

allowed otherwise seemingly pious churchgoers to forgo the biblical injunction to bring others, particularly those within ones household, to the true knowledge of the Christian religion. It is by no means a statement of antislavery, but it is an early and particularly clear statement of the principle that all people are spiritual, if not temporal, equals, and that all people are equally protected by the principles of the Golden Rule.

In a recent biography of Fox, Larry Ingle has argued that in his letter “For the Governour and his Council,” Fox was “at his conservative best” because he repudiated the radical views that he appeared to espouse in his 1657 letter.⁹ Although Ingle’s biography presents a much-needed challenge to earlier hagiographic representations of Fox, this assessment might be overly harsh. Faced with the politics of a small island that depended on slavery for its profits, Fox clearly toned down his rhetoric. We hear nothing more of the idea that the Gospel “is the Power, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*” emanating from George Fox while he was on Barbados. Despite this, we do not hear that he stopped holding meetings among the slaves either, nor do we hear that that he abandoned his broadly ameliorative message or his more specific injunction that, since slaves were part of a colonist’s household, then they were in equal need of spiritual care. Indeed, as well as continuing his preaching on the island, Fox produced further publications that dealt with the slavery issue to a greater or lesser degree. *To the ministers, teachers, and priests, (so called, and so stileing your selves) in Barbadoes*, published in 1672, is made up of forty-seven pages of closely printed invective, and contains a development both of Fox’s arguments about slavery, and of the rhetorical techniques used to present those arguments. A section early in the book calumniates the Barbados ministers’ attitude toward slavery:

And if you be Ministers of Christ, are you not Teachers of *Blacks* and *Taunies* (to wit, *Indians*) as well as of the *Whites*? For, is not the Gospel to be preached to all Creatures? And are not they Creatures? And did not Christ taste Death for every man? And are not they Men? And was not he a Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, as well as for the Saints? And so consider, if the Gospel was to be preached unto all (according as Christ commanded) why so you not teach the *Blacks* and

Taunies here? You may (it may be) say, *There is nothing to be gotten of them*: What, have they not souls for you to watch over and to cure? Are they not part of your Parishioners if not the greatest part? And why do you find fault with the *Quakers* (so called) for teaching of their Families, and instructing them (to wit) the *Blacks*, and *Taunies*, and *Whites*?¹⁰

It is clear that Fox imagined this passage as oratory. It makes use of several familiar rhetorical techniques: a series of rhetorical questions, a series of repeated words and phrases, a series of staccato phrases, and a series of grammatically lazy but rhetorically effective sentences opening with a conjunction. Together, these give the passage a driving rhythm suggestive of a hymn or a catechism. Whether or not intended ever to be actually spoken, this is a brisk passage that compels the reader to join in with the enthusiasm of the moment. The tone that Fox establishes is one not of compromise or submission, but rather of passion and conviction. The argument is equally robust. At the outset, Fox reasserts his earlier views that Africans are spiritual equals, and should thus receive spiritual instruction equivalent to that received by Europeans. Unlike in the letter "to the governours," however, he is no longer on the defensive. Rather than rejecting slanders against him, Fox instead turns on the ministers of the island, challenging them to justify their criticisms of Quaker practice. Again, he repeats his argument that a plantation is a "family" and that slaves should receive the same spiritual education as all family members, but his tone is far more combative than in his earlier letter. The above is merely a short extract from a passage that continues for some time in an equally robust manner. Clearly, by 1772, Fox had recovered both from the illness that dogged him on his arrival and from the defensiveness that characterized his first letter on the subject of slavery while in Barbados.

Gospel Family-Order

To the ministers, teachers, and priests appears to mark a considerable hardening of Fox's position on slavery and demonstrates that, while

early on in his stay in Barbados he may have been forced onto the back foot, his defensiveness at that point was both contingent and temporary. It is not, however, clear that the defensiveness of his “letter to the governours” was apparent in his spoken public discourse while on the island. We know that while still very ill, just a few weeks after arriving in Barbados, Fox preached a persuasive sermon that included a lengthy section on slavery. In the words of John Hull, Fox spoke to Barbados Quakers:

About training up their negroes in the fear of God, those bought with their money and such as were born in their families, so that all may come to the knowledge of the Lord that so with Joshua they may say, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord,” and that their overseers might deal mildly and gently with them and not use cruelty as the manner of some is and hath been, and to make them free after thirty years servitude.¹¹

Hull does not mention whether Fox felt a need to deny any allegations leveled against Quakers about teaching the slaves to rebel, although the absence of such a mention in such a short précis is not in itself conclusive proof. We do, however, have a reasonably detailed idea of the contents of this sermon since it, or something closely resembling it, was reprinted in London in 1676 as a pamphlet called *Gospel family-order, being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians*. Why it took Fox five years to publish this sermon is unclear. It is possible that Fox did not originally intend it to be published but changed his mind after hearing of the controversy caused by William Edmundson’s visit to Barbados in 1675, which is discussed below. Equally, it may simply have been low on his list of priorities. Either way, the pamphlet explicitly addresses the question of plantation management and represents both Fox’s most polished rhetorical approach and his final position on the topic. The book is nineteen pages long, with three additional pages of miscellaneous short extracts from related letters and texts. The main body of the text offers substantially the same arguments that we have seen in Fox’s earlier writings on

slavery, but these arguments are considerably extended and supported by copious evidence from scripture.

As the title suggests, Fox again takes as his central premise the idea that a plantation is a family. With this in mind he paraphrases Genesis 17:10–13, conflating the four verses to read, “*Every Man-child shall be circumcised in your Generations, and he that is born in thy House, or bought with Money of any Stranger, which is not of thy seed, shall be circumcised,*” a text which Fox reads as a clear indication that slaves are to be offered religious instruction in the hope that they will come to the light or, in other words, “be circumcised with the Spirit, which the outward Circumcision of the Flesh did type forth.”¹² The following ten pages do not add substantially to the core of this argument, but they do provide a great deal of additional scriptural evidence to support it. As Hull had indicated, Fox referred to Joshua 24:15 (“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”), and he also refers to several articles of the Mosaic Law that enjoin hospitality for strangers. Thirteen pages—two-thirds—of the book are taken up with this argument and, while the direction in which Fox was moving must have been clear to all present at the meeting in Barbados where this was first articulated, without the benefit of context there is little to suggest, other than the title of the book itself, that this is a tract on the management of slave plantations. Fox’s intentions become clearer only on pages 13 and 14 of the book, where he moves his argument onward from a general discussion of families and strangers to a more specific analysis of the role played by Africans in the Bible. This discussion contains an uncompromising restatement of his views in the 1657 letter, and to a certain extent returns to its potentially liberationist language:

And so now consider, do not slight them, to wit, the *Ethyopians*, the *Blacks* now, neither any Man or Woman upon the Face of the Earth, in that *Christ* dyed for all, both *Turks*, *Barbarians*, *Tartarians* and *Ethyopians*; he dyed for the *Tawnes* and for the *Blacks*, as well as for you that are called *Whites*; . . . And therefore now you should preach *Christ* to your *Ethyopians* that are in your Families, that so they may be free Men indeed, and be tender of and to them, and walk in

Love, that ye may answer that of God in their Hearts, being (as the Scripture affirms) all of one Blood & of one Mold, to dwell upon the Face of the Earth.¹³

As in some of Fox's earlier writings, this passage clearly proclaims the spiritual equality of all peoples, and makes an unmistakable case for the immediate amelioration of slavery with its call to slave owners to "be tender of and to them." A superficial reading might suggest, as with the 1657 letter, that Fox is going further and demanding emancipation under certain circumstances: slaves who have been brought to the light, he seems to be suggesting, "may be free men indeed." This reading is not supported by the rest of the text. Quoting from Deuteronomy 15:12, Fox raises the question of manumission: "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee." This is a practice, Fox argues, that "will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord." In translating this practice to the plantations, however, Fox somewhat alters the tariff:

To close up all, let me tell you, it will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord, if so be that Masters of Families here would deal so with their Servants, the *Negroes* and *Blacks*, whom they have bought with their Money, to let them go free after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully; and when they go, and are made free, *let them not go away empty-handed*, this I say will be very acceptable to the Lord, whose Servants we are, and who rewards us plentifully for our Service done him, not suffering us to go away empty.¹⁴

Fox's injunction concerning letting slaves go "empty-handed," taken directly from Deuteronomy, may have been a corrective to the occasional practice of emancipating slaves only at a point in their lives when they were no longer able to labor or to fend for themselves: a practice which was often effectively a death sentence. The rhetoric subtly invokes the Golden Rule, reminding readers that, just as they have servants, so in turn

they are servants of God and should treat their servants as they would expect God would treat them. It is revealing, however, that Fox alters the word of the Mosaic Law, enjoining Friends to let their slaves go free not after six years, nor even after the thirty years that Hull's report of the original sermon suggested, but only "after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully." Here, then, is at last revealed the meaning of the phrase in Fox's 1657 letter, which argued that "the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*, and is *Glad Tidings* to every *Captivated Creature*." Here too is revealed the meaning of the phrase in *Gospel family-order*, which argued that "you should preach Christ to your *Ethyopians* that are in your Families, that so they may be free Men indeed." Clearly, Fox intends only that spiritual freedom, or freedom from sin, be conferred by the light. Temporal freedom is still very much in the gift of the slaveholder, comes only after a long stretch of hard labor, and can be achieved only by good behavior. This might have been a crumb of comfort for some few slaves, but, as Larry Gragg has shown, only a "miniscule percentage" ever came to enjoy the comfortable retirement that Fox gestures toward. Fox certainly urged amelioration of sorts, and manumission at times, but he does not at any point come near to arguing for general emancipation or an end to either slavery or the slave trade.¹⁵

Gospel family-order nevertheless concludes on a solidly ameliorative note, and with an uncompromising invocation of the Golden Rule. Fox argues that certain civil rights and responsibilities be extended to slaves. Principal among these is marriage: "if any of your Negroes desire to marry, let them take one another before Witnesses, in the Presence of God, and the Masters of the Families." In the decades to come, Quakers would repeatedly criticize the plantation system for breaking up families and other personal connections, and thus forcing the enslaved into sinfulness. Fox is the first to make this argument, insisting that the enslaved not be allowed to "defile the Marriage-Bed" and thereby be "denied Debauchery, Whoredom, Fornication and Uncleaness." Finally, he asks his congregation to:

Consider with your selves, if you were in the same Condition as the Blacks are (and indeed you do not know

what Condition you or your Children, or your Childrens Children may be reduced and brought into, before you or they shall dye) who came as Strangers to you, and were sold to you as Slaves; now I say, if this should be the Condition of you or yours, you would think it hard Measure; yea, and very great Bondage and Cruelty.

And therefore consider seriously of this, and do you for and to them, as you would willingly have them or any other to do unto you, were you in the like slavish Condition, & bring them to know the Lord Christ.¹⁶

While the argument thus concludes with the strongest rule of them all, the text itself continues for another paragraph in which Fox offers a sort of personal coda. This helps to reaffirm Fox's rhetorical ethos, but it is also a glimpse into the personal difficulty he had in reconciling the beliefs he formed in England in the late 1650s about the spiritual equality of races and the necessity of ameliorating slavery with the reality of a slave plantation, as he witnessed it in Barbados in 1671. "Truly Friends," he writes:

Great Troubles I underwent about those Things; yea, sorely was my spirit troubled when I came into the Sense of these Things, which were over my Life, and burden'd my Life very much, to see, that Families were not brought into Order; for the *Blacks* are of your *Families*, and the many Natives of them born in your Houses: I had a sore Burden, and (I say) much Trouble, how that Righteousness might be brought through in the Thing, and Justice and Mercy set up in every Family and in every Heart, that so God might be honoured in every Family . . . And so I leave these Things to your serious consideration.¹⁷

This is a personal statement from a man very much troubled by what he has witnessed, and yet lacking the ability to conceive of what to us is the obvious answer: that righteousness cannot be brought through in the thing and thus the thing itself should be abolished. In Fox's

age, slavery appeared to most as an unpleasant and unfortunate affair, but no more capable of being abolished than the “Blastings, Mildews, Caterpillars” and other natural phenomena that troubled Fox elsewhere in *Gospel family-order*. Fox’s response to slavery is within the discourses available to him, and represents perhaps the first serious attempt in the English language to ameliorate the condition. His response is not certain, nor is it entirely consistent. In his writings on the matter Fox repeats himself, and sometimes contradicts himself, but we can plainly see that through the repeated writing and rewriting of some basic tenets he builds an increasingly sophisticated response to slavery, and an increasingly polished piece of rhetoric. In this, as well as seeing the development of his thought on slavery, we also get a fascinating insight into his creative process, and into the way he developed both the policy and the theology of the early Society of Friends. In the late seventeenth century, there was little reason to believe that Fox’s very tentative and perilously fragile views on slavery would come to be widely accepted among the Society of Friends. Nevertheless, as Thomas Drake points out, the fact that the founder of the Quakers questioned at least some aspects of slavery “lent the weight of authority to Quaker prophets of later generations who spoke out against slaveholding.” Although Fox’s words did not unleash an inevitable chain of events, they were nonetheless both suggestive and influential, and certainly presented no barriers to later Quakers whose abolitionism rested on more certain ground.¹⁸

William Edmundson and the Return to Barbados

George Fox was not the only Quaker to write about Barbados slavery in the 1670s. One of Fox’s party of 1671, William Edmundson, returned to the island in 1675. Shortly after, he expressed his views on slavery in letters addressed to Friends in America, and, forty years later, in his posthumously published *Journal*, an account of his visit to Barbados emerged which suggests that the reassurances Fox had made during his 1671 visit had done little to placate the Anglican plantocracy. Edmundson’s *Journal* is a polished autobiography that may have been

written with reference to a daily journal. The body of the text might have been edited by others, or may be Edmundson's final and polished self-representation. In either case, the events described, while almost certainly prompted from notes rather than from distant memory, form part of an even and balanced narrative that presents Edmundson as an indefatigable laborer in the cause of the Society of Friends. This impression is backed up with sixty pages of glowing testimonies from friends, relatives, and Quaker meetings. Throughout, while Edmundson's labors in the Americas are frequently mentioned, his views on slavery receive little attention. Edmundson does not recall that the issue of slavery had arisen during the 1671 visit to Barbados, nor does he have anything to say on the subject in his account of his third visit in 1683. The many appended letters written to Friends in the Americas are largely silent on the matter, as are the letters written from America and the Caribbean to his wife, and to Friends in England and Ireland. Overall, one is left with the impression that to the older Edmundson who produced the *Journal*, slavery was a very minor issue indeed.¹⁹

Bold claims have been made about Edmundson's role in the development of antislavery thought. With characteristic enthusiasm, Drake accords Edmundson "first place in the great succession of antislavery apostles," Jean Soderlund describes him as "probably the first Quaker to denounce slaveholding outright," while J. William Frost has argued that Edmundson "raised for the first time the question whether Christianity and slavery were compatible."²⁰ Their evidence is the passage in Edmundson's *Journal* describing his 1675 visit to Barbados, alongside some manuscript letters to Friends in America and the Caribbean. Apart from a passing reference to a "Ship from *Guinea*, bound for *Barbadoes* with three Hundred *Negroes*," which he encountered on his journey from Ireland, Edmundson's account of the 1675 Barbados trip centers on a rivalry he established with an Anglican clergyman, whom he calls "Priest Ramsey." Ramsey, according to Edmundson, "was a very bad man" who "abused Friends in foul Language, calling us *Hereticks*, *Blasphemers*, and *Traitors*." In what reads almost as a curious parody of chivalric masculinity, Ramsey challenged Edmundson to a theological duel. Edmundson was only too happy to give him satisfaction, replying:

Priest RAMSEY,

Forasmuch as thou in publick hast charg'd our Society with Heresie, Blasphemy and Treason; and that thou would'st prove this Charge from our own Books, and on that Account hast challenged me to a publick Dispute, I am willing, with the Lord's Assistance, to give thee a Meeting in Defence of our Faith and Doctrine.

A place was found, and both sides were allowed an hour to make their case. Edmundson claimed that an audience of "above three thousand people," or around a quarter of the free population of the island, attended the meeting, which had to be held outdoors as there was no building large enough to accommodate such a congregation. In Edmundson's view, the Quakers present were "cool in their Minds" but Ramsey "manifested his Folly to the Sight of the People" by "Railing and Slandering several Friends, sometimes against us all in general." The result, Edmundson concludes, was a resounding victory for himself. Edmundson was of course under no legal obligation to present the case impartially, but his treatment of the episode nevertheless seems remarkably self-aggrandizing, remarkably unconcerned for the welfare of enslaved people, and more immediately concerned with his own self-preservation and the preservation of the Quaker community on Barbados. Edmundson alleges that, presumably in a fit of pique at his failure to best Edmundson at the public meeting, Ramsey "went to the Governor, Sir *Jonathan Atkins*, and made a great Complaint against me, That I was a *Jesuit* come out of *Ireland*, pretending to be a *Quaker*, and to make the *Negroes* Christians; but would make them Rebels, and rise and cut their Throats." Just as Atkins was about to issue a warrant for Edmundson's arrest, Edmundson himself went to the governor to explain his true intentions regarding the slaves. "I told him," Edmundson writes:

It was a good Work, to bring them to the Knowledge of God and Christ Jesus, and to believe in Him that died for them, and for all Men; and that that would keep them from Rebelling, or Cutting any Man's Throat: but if they did rebel,

and cut their Throats, as he said, it would be through their own Doings, in keeping them in Ignorance, and under Oppression, giving them Liberty to be common with Women (like Beasts) and on the other hand starve them for want of Meat and Cloaths convenient: so giving them Liberty in that which God restrain'd, and restraining them in that which God allow'd and afforded to all Men, which was Meat and Cloaths.

At this, Edmundson claims, Atkins “grew very moderate.” The following day, Ramsey was brought before Atkins but was unable to prove any of the accusations against Edmundson. For this, says Edmundson, “the Governor check'd him, and several of the Council frown'd on him: then the Priest went on his Knees, and asked them Forgiveness; and from that time the Governor was kind to me.” There is no further mention of slavery in Edmundson's *Journal*.

Edmundson's depiction of the incident clearly shows that, like all autobiographers, he manipulated his account to present himself in a positive light. The story occupies almost all of his description of his 1675 visit to Barbados, and it is plain that other events have been suppressed. More to the point, Edmundson's insistence that his quiet rhetoric caused Governor Atkins to grow “very moderate” ignores historical facts. While Atkins may have tolerated Edmundson in the short term, within a year of this episode, in April 1676, the Barbados Council passed “An Act to prevent People called Quakers, from bringing Negroes to their Meetings.” Edmundson's testimony that Atkins was placated by reassurances that Quakers were not interested in fomenting slave rebellion is simply not consistent with this political reality. Indeed, in what may have been a pointed attack on Edmundson himself, the Act also contained a clause stipulating that “no Person or Persons whatsoever, That is not an Inhabitant and Resident of this Island, and hath been so for the space of Twelve Months together, shall hereafter publicly Discourse or Preach at the Meeting of the *Quakers*, upon the Penalty of suffering Six Months Imprisonment.” Not only had Edmundson failed to placate the plantocracy in the question of religious instruction for slaves, but also he seems to have prompted a general ban on all visiting Quakers from preaching on the island.²¹

Another reason to treat Edmundson's account with caution is that its form suggests a practiced retelling. The narrative movement from conflict to resolution, the triumph of good over evil, and the final scene of redemption lend the story a mythical quality. The repeated phrase that the slaves might become "Rebels, and rise and cut their Throats" becomes a kind of refrain or *aide-mémoire* consistent with the needs of oral storytelling. Formal and rhetorical qualities such as these relegate the story to the realm of anecdote, and make it difficult to determine how far it might actually be true. There is also evidence that Edmundson had repeated this story to others on Barbados such as the Quaker minister George Gray, whose reworking of Edmundson's argument is considered in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, accepting that Edmundson's narration represents some sort of actual event, we should note that, like Fox before him, Edmundson does not condemn either the utility or the morality of slavery as an institution but, instead, stresses to the governor the benefits to the planters that converting the enslaved might bring. Edmundson's arguments ultimately propose little in the way of amelioration of slavery, and much that might improve the profitability of the plantation and the security of the planter. Overall, the impression one forms is of a man anxious to show off his merits, and anxious to show up Priest Ramsey, for whom the slavery issue is a minor sideline that need be addressed only when it is used as a weapon against him. Naturally, Edmundson would do all he could to protect himself from arrest and imprisonment, and it is perhaps unfair to criticize him for presenting his own case, and the Quaker case more generally, in the best possible light. Nonetheless, while this story is a fine anecdote, probably often told, and not particularly reliable as history, it does demonstrate that at least some Quakers were educating their slaves in the Christian religion, that some representatives of the plantocracy were nervous about it, and that Quaker leaders such as Edmundson were prepared to defend their practice when challenged.

Although the question of slavery might have dropped out of Edmundson's mind completely once he got back to the British Isles, he was clearly concerned enough about it to write at least two letters on the topic before he returned. One of these, addressed to "Friends in Maryland, Virginia and Other Parts of America," was probably written

in 1676 in one of the colonies named in the title. It recapitulates some of Fox's thoughts on slavery, most of which only became public with the publication of *Gospel family-order* in the same year, but which Edmundson would have had from Fox firsthand. Edmundson again advances the idea that the Gospel conferred spiritual freedom, and that slaves are part of the plantation household. He instructs colonists to "let yo^r Servants & Slaves feel y^e Liberty of y^e Gospel, & partake of y^e fruit w^{ch} Springs in you from y^e powerfull operation of y^e Gospel w^{ch} is y^e Power of God, making their Condition your own; & y^t y^e comly Order of y^e Gospel may be set up, & kept, & lived in in all yo^r Families." The appeal to Friends to make the slaves' condition "your own" appears at this stage in the letter to be a reference to the Golden Rule rather than a literal demand, and this too must have been the way that Barbados Quakers would have interpreted the metaphorical idea of "y^e liberty of y^e Gospel" in relation to plantation slaveholding.²²

Both of these ideas are forcibly restated later in Edmundson's letter in ways that appear to extend the initial premise. After reminding his readers that "God is no respecter of Persons, but of every Nation, Tongue, and People" and that "doth not y^e Prophet say y^e Lord will stretch forth his hand to Ethiopia & will set up his Altar in Egypt," Edmundson turns his argument back on the reader, reminding him or her that "Christs comand is to do to others, as we would have y^m to do to us; and w^{ch} of you all would have y^e blacks or others to make you their Slaves wth out hope or expectation of freedome or liberty? would not this be an Aggravation upon your minds y^t would out ballance all other comforts? So make their conditions your own; for a good Conscience Void of offence is of more worth yⁿ all y^e World." This is an explicit invocation of the Golden Rule. Unlike the opening passages of the letter, it also appears to be a literal rather than a metaphorical appeal to Quakers to "make [the slaves'] conditions your own." It could well be argued that this intensification means that Edmundson is questioning the validity of slavery by offering Friends the unpalatable choice either of becoming slaves themselves or of setting their slaves free. Comparing this rhetorical maneuver with that in a second letter, written from Newport, Rhode Island, in September 1676, affirms at face value J. William Frost's contention that Edmundson "raised for the first time

the question whether Christianity and slavery were compatible.”²³ In the Rhode Island letter, Edmundson, again echoing Fox, reminded Friends that slaves were part of the household before arguing that:

Friends that have Negroes is to take great Care, to Restrain and Reclaim them, from their former Courses of their accustomed filthy, unclean practices, in defileing one another, they are to be Restrained, and Watched over, and diligently admonished in the Fear of God and brought to Meetings, that they may learn to Known God that made them, and Christ Jesus that died for them and all Men, and those things the Lord requires, and it would be acceptable with God, and answer the Witness in all, if you did consider their condition of perpetuall Slavery, and make their Conditions your own, and soo fulfill the Law of Christ, for perpetuall Slavery is an Agrivasion, and an Oppression upon the Mind . . . soo it would doo well to consider, that they may feel, see, and partake of your Liberty in the Gospel of Christ.²⁴

Edmundson's disgust is unsettling, while his emphasis on restraining and watching over slaves is a salutary reminder that in his view the supposed spiritual liberty the Gospel confers does not amount to liberty of the person or to freedom of action. At a first reading, this letter does not seem a very plausible candidate for the original posing of the question “whether Christianity and slavery were compatible.” It is important to recognize, however, that Edmundson's view that sinners should be restrained from sinful activities would have been considered by most of his contemporaries as appropriate to a range of situations, particularly those where a spiritually enlightened elite saw themselves in a role of custodianship over their social inferiors. Such views could equally have been applied to indentured servants or free laborers in Barbados, or to the vast mass of the laboring poor in England. More important is Edmundson's repetition of the idea that slavery is intrinsically an “aggravation” and “oppression” and that it is inconsistent with the Golden Rule. Nevertheless, while this seems a stronger statement of antislavery than anything found in Fox's work, a careful reading is

required. In the first letter, Edmundson argues that we would not ourselves want to be slaves “with out hope or expectation of freedom or liberty.” In the second letter, he argues that “perpetuall Slavery is an Agrivasion, and an Oppression upon the Mind.” The fact that some people may at some points of their lives find themselves in slavery is not in itself being questioned. The institution of slavery is not being attacked. Edmundson has qualms only about that variety of slavery which comes without any hope of freedom.

As we have seen, in his sermon on Barbados in October 1671, Fox himself reportedly instructed Barbados Quakers to emancipate their slaves “after thirty years servitude.” In *Gospel family-order*, published in the same year in which Edmundson wrote these letters, Fox explicitly called for slaves to be emancipated “after a considerable Term of Years.” If Fox’s and Edmundson’s positions result from some sort of collaboration or personal understanding, and there is no reason to suspect that they do not, this indicates that by 1676 there was a unified and pragmatic Quaker doctrine about slavery that managed on the one hand to proclaim the ideal of liberty while on the other to relegate the actual likelihood of emancipation to the realms of the spiritual or to the very distant future. Fox and Edmundson both surely knew that few slaves would live to see out thirty years’ service. Equally, they must have suspected that Quakerism in the Americas might not survive unscathed either the failure to address the spiritual equality of Africans, or the failure to adapt to the prevailing realities of the plantations. Their decision to focus only on “perpetual” slavery, and to call for emancipation only after a vague “term of years” maintains the appearance of taking a stand while allowing slaveholding Friends to conduct business as usual. It was a fudge, and like all fudges, it was not ultimately sustainable. On some level, Edmundson must have understood this. In a short postscript to his second slavery letter he reveals the extent of his personal doubt on the matter. “And many of you count it unlawfull to make Slaves of the Indians,” he notes before asking: “and if soo, then why the Negroes?” No answer is supplied, nor is any suggestion made. This moment of insight, according to Thomas Drake, is what elevates Edmundson to “first place in the great succession of antislavery apostles.” This is perhaps overassertive, but it is clear that at the moment when Edmundson wrote this

postscript he saw that there was—at best—a deep vein of hypocrisy in the American Quakers' attitude toward slavery.²⁵

Alice Curwen in Barbados

Some indication of the way that Fox's and Edmundson's approach to slavery was interpreted by Barbados Quakers can be gleaned from a short letter written by a Lancashire Quaker woman named Alice Curwen, who visited Barbados in 1676. Curwen, "hearing of the great Tribulation that the Servants of the Lord did suffer in *Boston in New-England*" found her "Spirit deeply affected" and was moved to "*travail in that Nation, and see that Bloody Town of Boston.*" So she did, visiting several colonies in North America during the first part of 1676, where she may well have met Edmundson, and may even have traveled with him: their itineraries for 1676 are remarkably similar. She then spent some time in Barbados before returning to England, where she died in 1679. The following year, her dying testimony, which had been taken down by Anne Martindall, was published alongside a number of testimonials, including that of Curwen's husband, Thomas. The central part of this tract is Curwen's own relation of her journeys in America, which begins as an autobiographical narrative, but which after seven pages mutates into a collection of her letters. As with both Fox's and Edmundson's writings, slavery is not a prominent theme. Indeed, it is mentioned only twice. Curwen tells us that she stayed about seven months in Barbados, "where we had good Service both amongst Whites and Blacks."²⁶ Clearly the Curwens were actively proselytizing Africans on the island, despite the recent law making that illegal. Whether resident Barbados Quakers were following their example is less clear. In a now celebrated letter, Curwen berates another Friend for not paying attention to the spiritual welfare of her slaves. Curwen prefaces the letter with a short introductory passage:

There was a Widdow-Woman in *Barbadoes* that had *Negro's* to her Servants, who were Convinced of God's Eternal Truth, and I hearing of them was moved to go to

Speak to the Woman for their coming to our Meetings; and when I did speak to her she did deny me, and then I did write to her as followeth.

Martha Tavernor;

I cannot pass by, but in Love write to thee, for in Love we came to visit thee, and to invite thee and thy Family to the Meeting; but thou for thy part art like him that was invited to work in the Vineyard, and went not: And as for thy Servants, whom thou callst thy *Slaves*, I tell thee plainly, thou hast no right to reign over their Conscience in Matters of Worship of the Living God; for thou thy self confessedst, that *they had souls to save as well as we*: Therefore, for time to come let them have Liberty, lest thou be called to give Account to God for them, as well as for thy self: So in thy old Age chuse rather, as a good Man did, that both thou and thy whole Family may serve the Lord; for I am perswaded, that if they whom thou call'st thy Slaves, be Upright-hearted to God, the Lord God Almighty will set them Free in a way that thou knowest not; for there is none set Free but in Christ Jesus, for all other Freedom will prove but a Bondage.²⁷

Maira Ferguson argues that "Curwen's self-conscious and perhaps sarcastically rendered rejection of the word *slaves* and her deliberate substitution of the word *servants* marks a forthright and critical rupture in the text. . . . Alice Curwen disparages Tavernor's labelling of people as 'slaves' because such nomenclature denies their sacred worth." Ferguson's argument is compelling. By denying Tavernor the right to use the word "slave," Curwen is implicitly denying the possibility that slavery is a legitimate condition. This in itself marks Curwen's position in this letter as more strongly opposed to slavery than either Fox or Edmundson had allowed themselves to be. Ferguson's analysis is sound, but Curwen's stance is arguably both stronger and more subversive of existing Quaker thought than Ferguson suggests. Curwen introduces her letter by accepting as axiomatic Fox's argument that slaves form part of the household. She came to Tavernor "to invite thee and thy Family to the Meeting" and in this context "family" clearly includes slaves. After this,

Curwen's thinking begins to deviate considerably from the compromise that Fox and Edmundson had worked out, and her demands become far more radical. Under the Barbados Slave Code, Tavernor had a perfect legal right to command her slaves in any way she saw fit. Curwen denies that this is the case. Self-consciously using plain words, she tells Tavernor that "thou hast no right to reign over their Conscience in Matters of Worship of the Living God." At first sight, this seems like a forthright condemnation of the terms of the Slave Code. On closer examination, however, we realize that it is literally true. Martha Tavernor's reluctance to bring her slaves to meetings becomes explicable when we recall that holding meetings for the enslaved was already illegal by the time Curwen arrived on the island, probably in late August 1676. Indeed, by the time Curwen wrote this letter, probably the only legal right Tavernor did *not* have over her slaves was the right to educate them in her religious beliefs. With a keen sense of irony, Curwen has highlighted the absurdities of the Slave Code. If the law prevents Tavernor from compelling her slaves to go to meetings then logically it must also (if it is a fair law) prevent her from restraining them if they positively wish to go. Of course, what Curwen implies is that this is by no means a fair law. To echo Ferguson, her writing is indeed both self-conscious and sarcastic.²⁸

Curwen also alludes to Fox's argument that knowledge of the Gospel confers spiritual but not personal liberty when she tells Tavernor that "the Lord God Almighty will set [your slaves] Free in a way that thou knowest not." Before she articulates that Quaker orthodoxy, however, she has already demanded that Tavernor emancipate her slaves in the real world, demanding of Tavernor that "for time to come let them have Liberty." There is none of Fox's caution here. Curwen is not displacing the emancipatory act to an uncertain point in the distant future, to be contemplated only after a vaguely defined "considerable Term of Years." Instead, Curwen wants Tavernor to free her slaves now. As such, with this short letter, Curwen has a much better claim than either Fox or Edmundson to be the first Quaker to take an uncompromising line on slavery.

The writing of Fox, Edmundson, and Curwen demonstrates that a small but influential minority of seventeenth-century Quakers were

troubled by slavery when they encountered it in Barbados. Nevertheless, the absence of the issue from much of their other writing tells us that opposition to slavery, or even the desire to ameliorate slavery, was not central to their missions. Each went to Barbados to further the ends of the Society of Friends and, finding slaves on the island, attempted to reconcile the reality of slavery with Quaker principles. Curwen's two paragraphs offer the most radical statement on slavery that we have from the period, but the passing of the "Act to prevent People called Quakers, from bringing Negroes to their Meetings" in the spring of 1676 shows clearly enough that Fox's and Edmundson's attempts at compromise had not satisfied the Anglican plantocracy of Barbados. Ultimately, slavery could not be reconciled with Quaker thought, but it would take Quakers another seventy-five years to accept that. In the meantime, the Quaker population in Barbados, and in the Caribbean more generally, declined sharply as Quakers, variously and individually, driven out by repeated persecutions, growing unhappy with plantation slavery, or merely attracted by the prospect of a city and a country run by Quakers and for Quakers, abandoned the plantation islands for the newly founded colony of Pennsylvania.²⁹

CHAPTER TWO

“We are against the traffik of men-body”

PENNSYLVANIA, 1688–1700

THE DISCUSSION ABOUT SLAVERY THAT took place in seventeenth-century Barbados involved relatively few people, and was represented in relatively few texts. Quaker deliberations on slavery in Pennsylvania are not so conveniently self-contained. Seventy years elapsed between the first Pennsylvanian antislavery protests in the 1680s and the decision by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the 1750s to ban Friends from buying slaves. In that time, Pennsylvanian Quakers left hundreds of records of their thoughts on slavery, ranging from passing references in minutes of meetings to eloquent discussions in lengthy books. Clearly, a detailed reading of all of the available texts would be unwieldy. This chapter, and the three that follow, concentrate on those writings by Pennsylvanian Quakers, their close neighbors, and their frequent correspondents, which seem to have the most bearing on the outcome of the debates of the 1750s. The emphasis is therefore on reading manuscript records of events in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting alongside printed texts by those who attended or who attempted to influence that institution. The remainder of this book shows thereby that a few rarely repeated and poorly shared ideas and phrases of the 1680s had by the 1750s become widely shared and frequently repeated.

This chapter examines the ways in which a minority of Friends raised the slavery issue at a time when it was not a matter of general

concern, much less outrage. The opening text is the now celebrated 1688 Germantown Protest against slavery. Although it has long been said that this declaration disappeared both without trace and without influence, this chapter argues that it in fact left significant discursive traces in the antislavery pamphlet written by the supporters of the schismatic Quaker George Keith and in antislavery letters written by Cadwalader Morgan and Robert Pile. Through these, it was at least indirectly responsible for the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1696 advising Friends to avoid buying slaves. The chapter concludes that by the end of the seventeenth century, therefore, the Quaker discourse of antislavery in Pennsylvania, despite some elements of confusion and inconsistency, was in fact both remarkably intertextual and remarkably well-developed.

Antislavery Friends in the 1680s and 1690s were not writing in an absolute textual vacuum. Many early Quaker settlers in Pennsylvania had previously lived in Barbados, where they would have witnessed or even participated in the debates that were examined in Chapter 1. On the other hand, Friends arriving directly from Europe probably had little knowledge of the Barbados debates. Some of George Fox's letters may have circulated in manuscript, but his correspondence was not published until 1698, nor did his *Journal* appear until 1694. Even then, the *Journal* largely omitted discussion of the Barbados visit. *Gospel family-order*, which did give Fox's thoughts on slavery in some detail, was eventually published in Philadelphia in 1701, copied from the London edition of 1676 which some settlers may have brought with them. Fox's views on slavery were clearly accessible to colonial Quakers by the early eighteenth century. Writing about slavery in 1713, John Hepburn noted that: "George Fox printed against this Practice, and sent it to the *Barbadoes-Quakers*. Such was the early care of this excellent man above forty years ago; But his Christian Admonition was rejected." Thomas Drake argues that William Edmundson's 1676 slavery letter circulated "widely," which is plausible, even though Drake offers no evidence for this. On the other hand, Hepburn did not appear to know about Edmundson's thoughts on slavery. If they did circulate in manuscript, they had not reached Hepburn and would remain hidden to many others until the appearance of Edmundson's *Journal* in 1715. Alice

Curwen's *Relation* is not mentioned anywhere by Pennsylvanian Quakers, nor are there even recently acquired copies in the major libraries of Philadelphia, suggesting that the book never reached Pennsylvania. All in all, the evidence suggests that while the Barbados experience might have had a strong influence on a few individual Friends, in general it resonated only weakly in Pennsylvania in the early years of the colony.¹

The same seems true of the few metropolitan antislavery publications that had appeared by that time. There is little discussion in Pennsylvania, for example, of Thomas Tryon's two tracts on slavery, collected together in 1684 as part of his *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*, nor are Morgan Godwyn's thoughts on the matter much in evidence. This absence of discussion of either the colonial or the metropolitan slavery debate is perhaps why the first forceful protest against slavery in Pennsylvania came from neither London Friends or Barbados Friends but instead from a group of people for whom English was a second language and Quakerism a foreign sect that offered merely the nearest thing to their own brand of quietism. Once they had spoken, others would follow. By the end of the seventeenth century the question of slavery had been publically debated several times in Pennsylvania and the legacy of the Barbados debates firmly reinserted into public discourse.²

Germantown

In the spring of 1688, in Germantown, a Pennsylvania village that was just five years old, a small group of settlers put their names to a now celebrated statement of antislavery which has become known as the "Germantown Protest," or "Germantown Declaration." The statement was signed by Francis Daniel Pastorius, Gerrit Hendricks, Derick op den Graeff, and Abraham op den Graeff, part of a group of German and Dutch Pietists, Mennonites, and Quakers, mostly from the town of Griesheim, who had arrived in Pennsylvania seeking religious freedom. It outlined the reasons why the four were, as they put it, "against the traffik of men-body." The Protest was read out in their meeting in

Germantown, then passed upward through the colony's Quaker hierarchy for consideration, before being discussed, noted, and dismissed by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.³

The story should have ended there. In the eyes of most historians it did. According to historical orthodoxy, at the end of 1688 the Protest was filed away, lost, and forgotten until 1844, at which point it was rediscovered by abolitionists, reprinted, and distributed more widely than its original authors could possibly have imagined. Hailed in 1844 and afterward as the first formal statement of antislavery in territories that would later become the United States, it is nevertheless generally agreed that before 1844 the document had no impact or influence whatsoever on whatever conversations Quakers—or Americans more generally—were having about slavery and the slave trade. David Brion Davis, for example, maintains that the Protest cannot be seen as part of “a continuous and progressive evolution of antislavery doctrine.” More recently, Katharine Gerbner has argued that “it had no quantifiable effect on the socio-political structure of seventeenth-century Philadelphia.” Even the more generous Lery T. Hopkins argues that “the Germantown Protest can only be considered a manifestation of internal discussion since there is no evidence that anyone outside of the Monthly and yearly Meetings was aware of it.” For these historians, and others, the Germantown Protest, however inspiring subsequent generations might have found it, was a dead end, quickly forgotten, without influence or impact. By contrast, it is argued here that it was a seminal and connected moment in the development of Quaker antislavery discourse.⁴

Although it is impossible to know what private conversations about the morality of slavery might have taken place in the early years of the colony, that those conversations must have taken place is evident from the fact that Pennsylvania's first formal statement of antislavery comes from a group of men, and not from an individual. The Germantown Protest therefore had its origins in debate and discussion even though it is most often presented as a disconnected piece of text. Indeed, like many iconic documents such as the Magna Carta or the American Declaration of Independence, the physical document is sometimes considered to be as important as the ideas which it contains.

This piece of paper, it is generally agreed, was lost in 1689, found in 1844, lost again in 1874, and finally rediscovered, misfiled in the Philadelphia Quaker records, as recently as 2006.⁵ Because of this checkered history, most versions of the Germantown Protest available in print or on the Internet are based on nineteenth-century transcriptions made before the document was mislaid. In most cases, the editors corrected what they perceived to be mistakes of grammar and spelling, and most of them modernized the spelling as well. Although few of these “corrections” materially change the sense of the argument, with the rediscovery of the manuscript, the original orthography has again become apparent. The Protest is as follows:

This is to y^e Monthly Meeting held at Richard Warrells.

These are the reasons why we are against the traffik of men-body, as followeth: Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful & fainthearted are many on sea, when they see a strange vessel. being afraid it should be a Turck, and they should be tacken, and sold for Slaves into Turkey. Now what is this better done as Turcks doe? yea, rather is it worse for them, w^{ch} say they are Christians for we hear that ye most part of such negers are brought heither against their will & consent, and that many of them are stollen. Now tho’ they are Black; we can not conceive, there is more Liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying, that we shall doe to all men, licke as we will be done our selves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are. and those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not a licke? Here is liberty of Conscience, w^{ch} is right & reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of y^e body, except of evildoers, w^{ch} is an other case. But to bring men hither, or to robb and sell them against their will, we stand against. In Europe there are many oppressed for Conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed, w^{ch} are of a black colour. And we who know that men must not committ adultery, some doe

committ adultery in others, separating wives from their husbands and giving them to others, and some sell the children of these poor Creatures to other men. Ah! doe consider well this things, you who doe it, if you would be done at this manner? And if it is done according Christianity? you surpass Holland & Germany in this thing. This mackes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off, that y^e Quackers doe here handel men, Licke they handel there ye cattel. And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintaine this your cause, or plaid for it? Truely we can not do so, except you shall inform us better hereoff, viz: that christians have Liberty to practise this things. Pray! What thing in the world can be done worse towards us, then if men should robb or steal us away, & sell us for slaves to strange Countries, separating housbands from their wives & children. Being now this is not done at that manner we will be done at, therefore we contradict & are against this traffick of men-body. And we who professe that it is not lawfull to steal must likewise avoid to purchase such things as are stollan, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possibel. And such men ought to be delivered out of y^e hands of y^e Robbers & made free as well as in Europe. Then is Pennsilvania to have a good report, in stead it hath now a bad one for this sacke in other countries. Especially whereas y^e Europeans are desirous to know in what manner y^e Quackers doe rule in their Province., & most of them doe loock upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evill?

If once these Slaves; (: w^{ch} they say are so wicked and stubborn men should joint themselves, fight for their freedom and handel their masters & mastrisses, as they did handel them before; will these masters & mastrisses, tacke the sword at hand & warr against these poor slaves, licke we are able to believe, some will not refuse to doe? Or have these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?

Now consider well this thing, if it is good or bad? and in case you find it to be good to handel these blacks at that manner, we desire & require you hereby lovingly that you may informe us here in, which at this time never was done, viz., that christians have such a Liberty to do so. To the end we shall be satisfied in this point, & satisfie likewise our good friends & acquaintances in our natif Country, to whose it is a terrour or fairful thing that men should be handeld so in Pennsilvania.

This was is from our monthlly meeting at Germantown, hold y^e 18. of the 2. month 1688. to be delivered to the monthly meeting at Richard Warrell's.

garret hendericks
derick up de graeff
Francis daniell Pastorius
Abraham up Den graef

Two handwritten notes at the bottom of the page, in a different hand to the main text, recount the Protest's journey through the Pennsylvania Quaker hierarchy, noting its progress from the nearby Dublin Meeting, where the matter was considered too "weighty" for that meeting, to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, which likewise found it "a thing of too great A wayt for this meeting to determine." It reached its zenith at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in October 1688 (which in fact was held across the river at Burlington, West Jersey), where, according to the minutes of that meeting, "it was adjudg'd not to be so prop.^e for this meeting to Give a Positive judgment in the case it having so General a relation to many Other parts and therefore at p^sent they forbear it." Thus, no advice resulted from the issues articulated in the Germantown Protest, and, while Quakers would discuss slavery many times over the coming years, the Protest itself was never again directly referred to in the minutes of Quaker meetings.⁶

Writing in 1941, Hildegard Binder-Johnson observed that, "generally speaking the anti-slavery protest of 1688 has received more admiration and praise than critical investigation." Indeed, seventy years on, only Katharine Gerbner has made a serious attempt to interrogate

the text. She notes that the Protest “failed to follow the accepted textual conventions” of Quaker communications, which “traditionally began with a salutary introduction to fellow friends and normally included multiple references to Jesus Christ and God.” This “textual anomaly,” Gerbner argues, “is symptomatic of the cultural and linguistic discontinuities between the English and German-Dutch members of the Society of Friends.” As we shall see, this linguistic discontinuity manifests itself in the Protest’s diction, but it was also, in Gerbner’s view, “the reason the Protest was rejected by the English.” As with the argument that the Protest had little impact, so must we also be cautious about saying that it was rejected by as large a group as “the English”; the leadership of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were indeed mostly English, but several were Welsh. In any case, they were clearly less than enthusiastic about the Protest, but that does not mean that other Quakers were closed to its ideas. Indeed, the fact that the Protest dispensed with accepted textual conventions may have made it more attractive to Friends who were unhappy with the leadership, a possibility which is explored in more depth later in this chapter.⁷

Before reaching that point, we can attempt a critical reading of the text. The opening sentence is a clear declaration invoking the Golden Rule. In a pattern later repeated by dozens of Quaker antislavery writers, the Protesters state quite bluntly that “we are against the traffik of men-body” because “is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life?” This is a forthright condemnation of perpetual slavery as opposed to temporary indentured servitude but, of course, it is not original since it echoes George Fox’s advice that Quakers emancipate their slaves after a period of time varying from seven years to thirty years. Whether this aspect of the Protest derived directly from Fox is uncertain, but it seems unlikely that the Protesters had access to Fox’s writing on the topic. Ten years after the Protest, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting gave Pastorius the duty of “Collecting of all George Fox’s books & writings in these parts,” which suggests that Fox’s writings were scattered throughout the colony and not easily accessible. In any case, if the Protesters did have access to Fox’s writings on slavery, they do not allude to the fact, nor do they make much use of his specific arguments. It is only in their repeated

application of the Golden Rule that they, like Fox before them, draw attention to what would become the most central Quaker argument against slavery.⁸

What the Germantown Protesters write next certainly is original, and is the first articulation of a trope that was later to be familiar in abolitionist literature. Recognizing that general principles, even important ones such as the Golden Rule, are not enough to persuade, they provide an example. "How fearful & fainthearted are many on sea, when they see a strange vessel," they argue, "being afraid it should be a Turck, and they should be tacken, and sold for Slaves into Turkey." The writing is curiously poetic with its alliterative "fearful & fainthearted," its "tacken" by "Turcks," its almost playful delight in the homophony of "see" and "sea," and its preponderance of sibilants in "see a strange vessel." The authors may be speaking English as a second language, but they are clearly enjoying their new tongue. More to the point, the Turkish example is prescient. As Linda Colley has shown, fear of enslavement in the Islamic world was widespread among travelers in the period, and melancholy accounts of such incidents provided popular reading. Quakers were not immune from such fears. Indeed, each of the general epistles sent out from the London Yearly Meeting between June 1684 and June 1692 contains long and sometimes lurid accounts of a group of Friends who were "captives in Mequinez in Barbary, under the Emperor of Morocco." This emperor, whose "fury and cruelty" is emphasized, was well known, the epistles claim, since "he often kills men in cold blood at his pleasure." Fear of enslavement in the Islamic world was thus a central element of Quaker rhetoric in this period, and this almost certainly influenced both the Germantown Protesters and later abolitionists, both Quaker and non-Quaker, who would sometimes flag up Islamic slavery to point out the hypocrisy of Christian slavery. Christianity, they argued, was inherently a more merciful system than Islam and so Christians should behave likewise—although clearly many did not. "I do not believe in my Soul," wrote the antislavery Quaker Benjamin Lay in 1737, "the *Turks* are so cruel to their Slaves, as many Christians, so called, are to theirs."⁹

The Protesters use the occasion of the comparison between Christianity and Islam to go further, however, restating the Golden

Rule in terms that explicitly reject justifications for slavery based on race. Part of the argument is that most slaves are kidnapped and that kidnapping is illegal. It is also against Quaker precepts of nonviolence. This is quite in addition to the moral problem that we ourselves would not wish to be kidnapped, as demonstrated by our fear when Turkish ships approach. These might appear to be incontestable arguments for Quakers, but the Protesters recognized the existence of a double standard in which the same notions of law and nonviolence were not applied equally to Africans and Europeans. Realizing that the Golden Rule had thus become racialized, while not being able to “conceive” of any justification for that racialization, the Protesters call attention to the form of the Golden Rule—calling it “a saying”—and, having thus foregrounded its status as dictum, they embellish it in important ways. The saying says “that we shall doe to all men, licke as we will be done our selves.” This is the biblical injunction. The Protesters add: “macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are.” These sentiments can be found in the Bible, and are implicit in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ’s explication of the Golden Rule, but the form of words is new—newer even than the words written by George Fox a few years earlier when he had argued that “did not Christ dye for the *Blacks* and the *Taunies*, as well for the *Whites?*”¹⁰ Here, the Protesters explicitly deny any “difference” in the application of the Rule, regardless of “generation, descent or Colour,” and this refutation of the application of racial ideology to the Golden Rule is in itself an important reflection of the racial ideology of late seventeenth-century Pennsylvania. The triplet of words, encompassing all objections, is legalistic in register, and this type of forensic rhetoric no doubt echoes the legal quibbling that accompanied the buying and selling of chattel, but also reminds us that Francis Daniel Pastorius, the first of the Protesters, was a lawyer. “And those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them,” the Protesters continue, conflating the questions of legal and illegal commerce, “are they not a licke?”

The Protest continues in similar vein for a few lines before being punctuated by a heartfelt expostulation: “Ah! doe consider well this things, you who doe it, if you would be done at this manner?” Once again, the Golden Rule is the final authority, both intellectual and

emotional, but the puncture is brief and the document swiftly returns to more material considerations. Knowing well that the colony of Pennsylvania was a commercial enterprise that depended on a steady influx of colonists for its success, the Protesters consider the effect that slavery might have on the perception of potential immigrants that the colony was a place of universal toleration and brotherly love. News about slavery, they argue, “mackes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off, that y^e Quackers doe here handel men, Licke they handel there ye cattel. And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither.” The Germantown settlers were clearly under no illusions about the Friends’ commercial objectives in the colony, hence this hardheaded counterbalance to both the more theoretical and the more emotional discussion of the Golden Rule. Nevertheless, as Hopkins has pointed out, “this warning would seem to lack compelling logic [since] the predicted interruption in the flow of colonists to Pennsylvania never materialized.”¹¹

While the question of Pennsylvania’s reputation in Europe dominates the central section of the Protest, as the document progresses the Protesters’ thinking grows more radical. Quakers should oppose the slave trade since to own a slave is to receive stolen goods. “We who professe that it is not lawfull to steal,” they reason, “must lickewise avoid to purchase such things as are stollan, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possibel.” Such statements ask merely that Friends exclude themselves from the slave trade, and may have received a sympathetic hearing from many Quakers. When they state a little further on, however, that slaves “ought to be delivered out of y^e hands of y^e Robbers & made free as well as in Europe,” they push their argument further, demonstrating that they seek not merely to put an end to future slave trading, but to emancipate all existing slaves.

The uncompromising tone of this argument, no less than its unimpeachable morality, no doubt helped to secure the Protest’s short-term demise. Rather than suggesting that future slave-owning and -trading be regulated and eventually phased out, the Protest implied that otherwise honest and godly Friends were “robbers” and that it was the duty of all other Friends to immediately emancipate the slaves of those slaveholding Quakers against the will of their owners. This was a

highly principled stand, and one that later generations would applaud. At the time, however, it would have seemed to many as little more than a call for the colonial authorities to alienate the legally held property of some colonists. Neither English law, emerging colonial practice, nor Quaker notions about private property could countenance such a course of action. Indeed, it could quite plausibly have been argued by those present that alienating the property of colonists would have sent a far worse message to potential colonists in Europe than would the presumably widespread knowledge that Africans were being sold into slavery there.

In either case, the Protesters probably overplayed their hand in the following paragraph, where they invoked the specter of a slave uprising, but questioned whether such an uprising would automatically be unjust. What if the slaves “fight for their freedom and handel their masters & mastrisses, as they did handel them before,” they ask. “Will these masters & mastrisses, tacke the sword at hand & warr against these poor slaves, licke we are able to believe, some will not refuse to doe? Or have these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?” With this statement, the Protesters conflate two serious objections to Quaker slaveholding, both of which draw attention to the violence implicit in the master-slave relationship. If enslaved people “fight for their freedom,” they ask, will Quakers abandon their commitment to the Peace Testimony and take up the sword against them? This was not merely a hypothetical question. Uprisings of the enslaved were not unheard of, and while colonial Pennsylvania did not have the same ratio of slaves to slaveholders as did the plantation colonies of Barbados and Virginia, the possibility of an uprising of the enslaved that threatened the community as a whole was nonetheless a frightening idea. If the situation demanded it, the Protesters ask, would pacifist Quakers use violence to put down such an uprising? The reality was that most acts of resistance did not involve the gathering together of hundreds or thousands of enslaved people or the necessity to call out the troops. Instead, slaves daily registered their protest against slavery as individuals by absconding, by refusing to work, by working inefficiently, or by directly challenging, verbally or violently, their immediate overseers. Throughout the colonies, such acts of resistance were usually met with

an immediate violent response which slaveholders justified as necessary to maintain discipline and to prevent major uprisings. Pennsylvania was not a classic plantation colony, and the likelihood of a major slave uprising taking place along the lines suggested by the Germantown Protesters was clearly exaggerated, but nonetheless enslaved people in Pennsylvania were not exempt from forceful coercion, even if Fox had exhorted Quaker slaveholders to show restraint. By drawing attention to the possibility of a general slave uprising, the Germantown Protesters are in fact drawing attention to the violence implicit in all slaveholding, the prospect of a coordinated violent response to a single mass rebellion metonymically representing the many daily acts of violence by which slavery was maintained.

Hyperbole can be a dangerous rhetorical strategy, and metonymic hyperbole especially so, because if we exaggerate a part then we also exaggerate the whole, and in proportion. If the exaggerated threat of a general slave rebellion in Pennsylvania represents the inherently violent nature of slavery, then dismissing the possibility of that rebellion makes it easier to dismiss the central rhetorical thrust of the argument. It would not have been difficult for those present in the meetings where the Protest was read to argue that there was little likelihood of a general uprising in Pennsylvania at that time, and thus the danger of Quakers needing to take up arms was correspondingly overstated. The Protesters overplayed their hand in other ways as well, not least in that they questioned whether a slave rebellion would actually be unjust: "have these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom," they ask, "as you have to keep them slaves?" By asserting that slaveholding and rebellion are equivalent, the Protesters would probably win the approval of most twenty-first-century readers. By contrast, their contemporaries, some of whom were slaveholders and most of whom believed in the inviolability of private property, may well have greeted this rhetorical maneuver with dismay. Like many protesters, the Germantown Protesters undercut their own arguments with a rhetoric that was more radical than its audience could bear. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the monthly meeting at which it was read decided that it was "not expedient for us to meddle with it," and promptly passed on responsibility to a higher body. As we have seen, the Protest moved up through the Quaker hierarchy

and ultimately failed to secure the support of enough Friends for a decision to be reached.

According to the often told story, the manuscript was lost and forgotten for a century and a half, and had no bearing or influence on the direction of subsequent Quaker thinking on slavery. Then, in 1844, the Philadelphia-based Quaker journal *The Friend*, in a somewhat excitable tone, announced that “the testimony of the Friends at Germantown against slavery, sent up to the Yearly Meeting of 1688, has, within the last few days, been discovered.” That an antiquarian discovery should be hurried so quickly into press is a clear indication of the importance attached to it by contemporary Quakers, and the author, Nathan Kite, is quick to praise the sentiments expressed while also carefully distancing himself from the language of the Protest. He argued that “it is certainly a strong document; and whilst it bears evidence that the writers had an incompetent knowledge of the English language, it plainly demonstrates that they were well acquainted with the inalienable rights of man, and with the spirit of the gospel. We publish it as it is in the original, and doubt not that our readers will find sufficient clearness in the argument, notwithstanding some confusion in the use of prepositions.” In fact, Kite had “corrected” the document to some extent, and other commentators would also see the language as problematic. Marion Dexter Learned, in her 1908 biography of Pastorius, noted that the Protest was in Pastorius’s handwriting and that “it is easy to detect the earmarks of his style and manner of thought in the quaint Germanisms of the document.” Allegations of quaintness and linguistic incompetence somewhat mask the fact that Pastorius, as Learned herself shows at length, was a noted intellectual, published author, lawyer, schoolmaster, and the founder and first citizen of Germantown. The “quaint Germanisms” might also have been more strategic than Learned acknowledges. The repeated use of the verb “handel,” for example, is no doubt an intended macaronic pun combining English meanings of the word with the German meaning “to trade.” As Kite’s article makes clear, however, to mid-nineteenth-century observers the Protestors’ language was of secondary importance to the seemingly self-evident truth that the Protesters “were well acquainted with the inalienable rights of man, and with the spirit of the gospel.” In 1844, the document was thus hailed

as an early statement of antislavery in the New World, and proof that the abolition movement, at that time gathering in strength, had a long history in America.¹²

Despite its alleged disappearance and its sensational rediscovery, the Protest of 1688 was in reality an influential document in its own time, with a discursive afterlife in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since much of its rhetoric resurfaces in later Quaker writing on slavery. Indeed, it cannot even be said to have been truly lost since for most of its history it was unlooked for and it had, in fact, merely been misfiled. Moreover, although the piece of paper containing the exact text of the Protest was not readily at hand before 1844, the Germantown Quakers' position on slavery was well known throughout the eighteenth century and beyond. In 1715, the New Jersey Quaker John Hepburn speaks of "the *German Quakers*, who live in *German Town* near *Philadelphia*, Who (to their renowned Praise be it spoken) have above all other Sects in America, kept their Hands clean from that *vile Oppression* and *inriching Sin* of making Slaves of the their fellow Creatures, the Negroes, as I was credibly informed by one of themselves."¹³ Hepburn's comments provide evidence that the sentiments and legacy of the Protest were being discussed in the early eighteenth century even at a distance. Indeed, the Protest itself was well enough known for Thomas Clarkson to allude to it in his important *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, published in London in 1808. This book includes a "map" of the abolitionist movement from its beginnings with George Fox to its accomplishment with Thomas Clarkson. Portraying the progress of the abolition movement as a network of rivers and tributaries, Clarkson clearly marks the first "tributary" as "Qua. Pennsylvania 1688." In the text of the book he notes that "so early as in the year 1688, some emigrants from Krieshiem in Germany, who had adopted the principles of William Penn, and followed him into Pennsylvania, urged in the yearly meeting of the Society there, the inconsistency of buying, selling, and holding men in slavery, with the principles of the Christian religion."¹⁴ Three decades later, in 1838, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier spoke of the Protest in his poem on the opening of the ill-fated Pennsylvania Hall, referring to:

That brother-band,
The sorrowing exiles from their 'FATHER LAND,'
Leaving their homes in Kriesham's bowers of vine,
And the blue beauty of their glorious Rhine,
To seek amidst our solemn depths of wood
Freedom from man, and holy peace with God;
Who first of all their testimonial gave
Against th' oppressor,—for the outcast slave.¹⁵

Pennsylvania Hall was burned down just a few days later by antiabolitionists, but this did not alter the presence of the Germantown Protest in antislavery discourse. While the physical text of the Germantown Protest may have been unavailable to Hepburn, Clarkson, and Whittier, the fact that the Protest took place clearly did not require rediscovery.

It is also a mistake to argue that the Protest was without influence or, in the words of David Brion Davis, that it cannot be seen as part of "a continuous and progressive evolution of antislavery doctrine." On the contrary, sufficient evidence survives to show that it was indeed a factor in the development of subsequent Quaker antislavery thought, and there are more direct lines of connection than the merely discursive. The minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for 1688 show that it was "Agreed that an Epistle be sent from this Meeting to that at London." The letter arrived safely in London, and it is still there. While its contents make no reference to the Germantown Protest, its authorship is significant. A committee of eight Friends, all of whom were present at the meeting, was formed to send the letter, headed by George Keith, whose schismatic followers would five years later publish the first important antislavery pamphlet in the English language, a pamphlet examined in detail in the next section of this chapter. Keith was clearly present when the Germantown Protest was read and discussed and, as a senior—and famously outspoken—member of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, it is inconceivable that he played no part in the discussion that followed.¹⁶

Keith may not have written the 1693 pamphlet, but it was clearly published with his blessing. As we shall see, there are enough similarities to indicate that the authors had Germantown in mind when they

composed their pamphlet. Moreover, the fact that the Germantown Protest did not obey the conventions of Quaker texts may well have been a draw for Keith's schismatic followers. In any case, the 1693 pamphlet was merely the start. Both the ideas and the language of the Germantown Protesters are restated over and again by Quaker writers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in this way the Protest became incorporated into a wider and a longer discourse of anti-slavery. Although the document did not have "impact" in the sense that it was not the immediate end either of slavery or of the slave trade, the Germantown Protest went on to have a discursive afterlife, being referred to or echoed by many Quaker antislavery writers over the coming years. Such is the nature of public discourse; once articulated, the arguments made by the Protesters neither could be unsaid nor could they be controlled or contained in the future. Although not immediately convincing the Quaker hierarchy to formally condemn slavery, the Germantown Protest clearly initiated a public discourse of antislavery in Pennsylvanian Quaker society. We can therefore conclude that it was ultimately neither a failure nor a missed opportunity but, instead, a key moment in the development of the rhetoric of antislavery.

George Keith's Faction Cautions Friends

The Germantown Protest may not have convinced the Philadelphia Quaker leadership to take immediate action against slavery, but for this reason its arguments became a useful tool for one faction of Quakers to assert a distinct position from that of the mainstream Quaker hierarchy. The anonymously authored pamphlet called *An exhortation and caution to Friends concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*, printed in New York in 1693 by the Philadelphian printer William Bradford, was part of what historians call "the Keithian controversy." This eponymous dispute earned its name from George Keith, an educated Scottish Quaker who questioned the doctrine of the "inward light" and taught the doctrine of the "two Christs"—that is, he considered Christ separately in his spiritual and in his physical manifestations, and he believed that Quakers should subscribe to a uniform confession of faith. These attenuated

theological discussions would most likely not have attracted the interests of many were it not for the fact that Philadelphia had been experiencing considerable political turmoil in recent years, to the extent that a disenfranchised section of the population needed a focus around which to coalesce. Almost from the start, William Penn's proprietary system of government had brought him into conflict with Pennsylvania's most powerful colonists. In 1688, Penn had appointed a New England Puritan, John Blackwell, as deputy governor in the hope of imposing order on the faction-ridden colony. The attempt had failed, and little more than a year later the faction representing Philadelphia's most powerful Quaker landowners and merchants was returned to power under the leadership of Thomas Lloyd, who had led opposition to Penn's proprietary system. In power, Lloyd demonstrated authoritarian tendencies, while at the same time the colony was facing a number of external pressures including the outbreak of war with France and an influx of Anglican and other non-Quaker immigrants into the region. Into this brew came Keith, whose challenge to "orthodox" Quakerism represented to many a challenge not to its theological tenets but to its autocratic colonial leaders. As Gary Nash has shown, "What began as a doctrinal protest became a formula for expressing far more down-to-earth resentments. A whole stratum of lesser merchants, shopkeepers, and master artisans—upward moving individuals, not a few of whom would enter the circle of mercantile leadership in the next decade—found that Keith's program provided a means of challenging the Lloydian 'greats,' who were resented for their narrow control of provincial life."¹⁷

The controversy reached its height early in 1693, when Keith's followers, calling themselves the "Christian Quakers," erected an alternative platform in Philadelphia's central meeting house. The two sides traded insults over the heads of the congregation until, as Nash puts it, "axes appeared from nowhere as each group sought to destroy the other's gallery. Posts, railings, stairs, seats—all went down before the angry blows of the two opposed camps." That the controversy had led to violence indicates the depth of feeling present in a community famed for its Peace Testimony. The event also marks a failure of public discourse. Although Philadelphia had only one printer, William

Bradford, he had been happy to print literature for both sides, and, until September 1692, the controversy had accordingly been conducted as a pamphlet war. In that month, Lloyd had Bradford imprisoned and his press confiscated. Without an outlet for their resentments, it is not surprising that the colonists' tempers boiled over. Neither is it surprising that, in the months following the meeting house fracas, the Keithians, in the face of increasingly repressive measures from Lloyd's administration, should seek to find issues on which to campaign that did not directly attack Lloyd or his authority. Slavery was just such an issue. Not only could the "Christian Quakers" position themselves as morally superior to the "orthodox" Quakers, but they could also use antislavery sentiment to make an implicit attack on the alleged wealth and corruption of the emerging Quaker aristocracy. In early Philadelphia, a slave was a substantial investment. Lloyd's associates, and the wealthy Quakers he represented, were far more likely to be slaveholders than were the "lesser merchants, shopkeepers, and master artisans" who supported Keith. The Keithian discussion of slavery can thus be seen primarily as a displacement of a set of more general social and economic grievances of Philadelphia's middling sort, and the pamphlet, in the words of John Smolenski, was "an exhortation that implicated many of the wealthy and powerful men who headed Pennsylvania's Quaker community."¹⁸

At six pages, *An exhortation and caution to Friends* is not long. Its opening passage, with its appeal to "all such who are sincere *Christians* and true Believers in Christ Jesus," is a reminder of its role in the controversy between "orthodox" Quakers and Keith's "Christian Quakers," and there are further reminders of the theological basis of the dispute at regular intervals. Schismatic rumblings aside, however, the pamphlet contains objections to slavery based on not only scriptural exegeses, but also moral principles that are more universal, or at least less identifiably sectarian. There are also submerged indications that the authors have considered the economic consequences of slavery. The pamphlet takes the form of a two-page introduction, followed by "Some Reasons and Causes of our being against keeping of Negroes for Term of Life." Five reasons are given, over four pages, some of which repeat material from the introduction and some of which introduce new ideas. The

introduction begins by tackling the racial basis of Atlantic slavery, arguing that Christ died for all and “His Gospel of Peace, Liberty and Redemption from Sin, Bondage and all Oppression, is freely to be preached unto all, without Exception, and that *Negroes, Blacks and Taunies* are a real part of Mankind, for whom Christ hath shed his precions [*sic*] Blood, and are capable of Salvation, as well as *White Men*.” This is a bold and effective opening maneuver, echoing George Fox’s argument that God “hath made all *Nations of one Blood*,” as well as the Germantown Protesters’ insistence that the Golden Rule applies to all, regardless “of what generation, descent or Colour they are.” It is, in effect, a strong challenge to those slaveholders who disputed the essential humanity of Africans. J. William Frost argues that this is its central passage: “Grounding their argument upon the fact that all men experienced the Light,” he argues, the pamphleteers “demanded that Friends clear themselves from this evil by restoring freedom to their slaves.” The pamphlet does indeed endorse spiritual equality as a theological principle, but, more boldly, it also asserts antislavery as a Christian duty: “all such who are sincere *Christians*,” the authors continue, have a responsibility to “ease and deliver the Oppressed and Distressed, and bring into Liberty both inward and outward.” Just as Keith emphasized a distinction between the “two Christs,” so the pamphlet’s authors highlight a distinction between two types of liberty. Inward liberty is the spiritual sort that brings freedom from sin, while outward liberty is liberty of the body; the variety of freedom that these authors imply is the right of every part of mankind. For the Keithians, conversion and emancipation are two sides of the same equation, and it is incumbent upon true Christians to bring the blessings of both to their slaves.¹⁹

Clearly, the pamphlet’s authors intended both to proselytize to their cause as well as to raise objections to slavery, but this should not prevent us from recognizing that the pamphlet does indeed offer a genuine, if somewhat hesitant, antislavery agenda. Where Fox and Edmundson, in their writings about Barbadian slavery, had merely hinted that slaveholding was incompatible with Christianity, the Keithian pamphleteers make plain that this is the foundation of their opposition to slavery. The second part of the introduction accordingly starts with a restatement of the idea that genuine Christians have a duty

to relieve suffering. "We judge it necessary," they assert, "that all faithful Friends should discover themselves to be true *Christians* by having the Fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which are *Love, Mercy, Goodness, and Compassion* towards all in Misery, and that suffer Oppression and severe Usage, so far as in them is possible to ease and relieve them and set them free of their hard Bondage." There is some rhetorical maneuvering here since, to many contemporary readers, the easing and relieving of the pain of an enslaved person could arguably be done without actually setting him or her free. Recognizing this, the pamphleteers note that "in some places in *Europe* Negroes cannot be bought and sold for Money, or detained to be Slaves, because it suits not with the Mercy, Love & Clemency that is essential to *Christianity*." The example would perhaps have been stronger had they named any of those European locations, but the point is nevertheless made that it is not merely the Keithian Schismatics who view slavery as incompatible with Christian mercy, but that this is a widely held opinion. In this, the Keithians are making essentially the same point that the Germantown Protesters did when they argued that European Quakers would see Pennsylvanian slavery as a cruel oppression, but they are also making the wider claim that slaveholding is universally incompatible with Christianity in all its essentials. This is the first time that Pennsylvanian Quakers assert the incompatibility of slaveholding with Christianity on broader principles than the Golden Rule alone. That comes later, but before it does, in a breathless cataloguing of the evils of slavery, the pamphlet notes that the trade that supplies the colony with slaves is inherently inimical to Quaker principles in that it prevents effective evangelization, and as the slave trade "is occasion of much War, Violence, Cruelty and Oppression" it infringes the Peace Testimony. They conclude the passage by arguing that "to buy such is the way to continue these evil Practices of Man-stealing, and transgresseth that Golden Rule and Law, *To do to others what we would have other do to us*." Having, in two paragraphs, listed most of the major Quaker objections to both slavery and the slave trade that would appear over the coming centuries, they reach the point of their pamphlet:

Therefore, in true *Christian Love*, we earnestly recommend it to all our Friends and Brethren, Not to buy any

Negroes, unless it were on purpose to set them free, and that such who have bought any, and have them at present, after some reasonable time of moderate Service they have had of them, or may have of them, that may reasonably answer to the Charge of what they have laid out, especially in keeping Negroes Children born in their House, or taken into their House, when under Age, that after a reasonable time of service to answer that Charge, they may set them at Liberty, and during the time they have them, to teach them to read, and give them a Christian Education.

With its circumlocutions, its quasi-legalistic language, and its frequent and apologetic repetition of the word “reasonable,” this passage has all the hallmarks of a political demand framed by a committee whose members did not agree unanimously on the extent to which the fine rhetoric and moral posturing of the previous paragraphs should or could actually be applied in the real world. The opening demand is perhaps the easiest. Those who are not already slaveholders would find it less onerous to find alternative sources of labor than those who had already committed to the slave-labor system. The problem arises when they need to tell Friends who already own slaves what they should do with them. Here, there is a clash of two fundamental principles since the moral imperative that slavery infringes the Golden Rule and Quaker injunctions to nonviolence is in contention with the principle that private property is sacrosanct. Once again, as is so often the case with early Quaker writing on slavery, a fudge is proposed. Provided that Quakers treat their existing slaves “moderately” and provide them with a Christian education, the Keithians suggest that Friends are exempt from freeing them until they have extorted from them sufficient labor to “reasonably answer to the Charge of what they have laid out.” What constitutes “reasonable” in this context is not made clear. The implication is that slaves should be made free when they have worked off the price of their purchase, their board, their lodging, and the board and lodging of their children. How this is to be calculated is left vague. Indeed, the pamphleteers echo the language used by George Fox when he too fudged the issue of manumission. As we saw in Chapter 1, Fox

had told Quaker slaveholders to set their slaves free “after a considerable Term of Years.” The Keithian tariff is “after a reasonable time of service.” In both cases, the final decision is left in the hands of the slaveholder, and, in both cases, rather than insisting on immediate emancipation what is suggested is that chattel slaves be converted, effectively, into indentured servants.²⁰

Despite the fudge, the pamphlet contains undeniably solid arguments against slavery. Most of these are made in some form in the opening paragraphs, but are developed and systematized in a series of five “Reasons and Causes of our being against keeping of Negroes for Term of Life.” These five paragraphs act as a sort of primer, or prompt-book, for those who wished to take away the antislavery arguments of the pamphlet for use in spoken discourse, or who might perhaps wish to use the arguments as the basis for further antislavery writing. This would later become a standard abolitionist technique used by antislavery writers as far removed as John Hepburn and James Ramsay, but here it is new, at least as far as writing on slavery is concerned. Since some of the arguments are also new, and all of them are significant, it is useful to review each of them in turn.²¹

The first argument against slavery is “because it is contrary to the Principles and Practice of the *Christian Quakers* to buy Prize or Stollen Goods.” Keith’s “Christian Quakers” did not, of course, have a monopoly on this principle: it was “orthodox” Quakerism as well. The point had also been made by the Germantown Protesters, a fact which Keith knew well since he had been present when the Protest had been debated. The problem for both sets of antislavery thinkers was not to convince other Friends to refrain from buying stolen goods, but to convince them that slaves are by definition stolen goods—particularly since a refusal to accept the legitimacy of slavery implies that human beings can never be “goods” to be stolen.

The second argument is the Golden Rule. As with the Germantown Protest, and the writing of Fox and Edmundson before them, it is “perpetual Bondage and Slavery” that is singled out as something we would never want done to us, not indentured servitude limited by a term of years. There is also an exemption for “notorious Criminal Offenders.” This exemption provided a get-out clause, as slave traders often claimed

that their slaves were legally held captives: either criminals or prisoners of war who would otherwise have been executed. Whether this claim was widely believed is a moot point. Clearly, despite offering slave traders such an easy escape, the Keithian pamphleteers did not believe it themselves, since they had argued that “commonly the Negroes that are sold to white Men, are either stollen away or robbed from their Kindred.”

The third and fourth arguments arise from specific injunctions from Mosaic Law, but in both cases the law has been interpreted quite freely, a fact that the authors foreground with their use of conditional and somewhat hesitant language. Quoting from Deuteronomy 23:15—“Thou shalt not deliver unto his Master the Servant that is escaped from his Master unto thee”—they argue “by which it appeareth, that those which are at Liberty and freed from their Bondage, should not by us be delivered into Bondage again.” This is the first time that this piece of scripture is applied to colonial slavery, and its implications are far-reaching. Not only does the text imply that slaves have a God-given right to emancipate themselves by absconding, but it also seems to be saying that Christians have an active duty to assist slaves who abscond. This injunction, little noted in the late seventeenth century, was to become a central plank of nineteenth-century American abolitionism. It was the oft-quoted scriptural evidence against the fugitive slave laws, and the biblical passage that justified the existence of the Underground Railroad. Here it is new, and, given the profound implications of their interpretation, it is not surprising that the pamphleteers are somewhat hesitant.²²

The fourth argument is taken from the immediately following chapter of Deuteronomy, which commands that “thou shalt not oppress an hired Servant that is poor and needy. . . . Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him.” The pamphleteers’ response to this is more personal than legalistic: “but what greater Oppression can there be inflicted upon our Fellow Creatures,” they expostulate, “than is inflicted on the poor Negroes!” Of all the five arguments, this is the longest but also the least coherent. It in fact brings together four distinct positions, loosely connected by the theme of oppression. The first oppression is man-stealing, already dealt with by the pamphleteers. The second is the physical cruelty that many slaveholders inflict on their slaves. Many that

buy slaves, the authors note, “do exceedingly afflict them and oppress them, not only by continual hard Labour, but by cruel Whippings, and other cruel Punishments.” The third oppression is that slaves often have “short allowance of food.” Their argument becomes very specific at this point, and they list the time allowed to slaves to grow crops, the space allotted to them, and the crops they grow. They are unwilling, however, to accuse any slaveholder close to home of depriving slaves of food. Instead, with an anecdotal vagueness that is the hallmark of much colonial discourse, where the worst cases and most astonishing discoveries lie just over the horizon, they accuse only “some Planters in *Barbadoes* and *Jamaica*” who “tis said” allow their slaves insufficient food. This leads into the fourth oppression, which is that this “doubtless is far worse usage than is practiced by the *Turks* and *Moors* upon their Slaves.” As we have seen, the Germantown Protesters invoked the Christian dread of enslavement by Muslims, but whereas they used the Islamic slave trade as an example to prove the application of the Golden Rule, the Keithian pamphleteers use it to distinguish between what they perceive as true and false Christianity. “It would be better for all such as fall short of the Practice of those *Infidels*,” they argue, “to refuse the Name of a Christian, that those *Heathen* and *Infidels* may not be provoked to blaspheme against the blessed Name of Christ, by reason of the unparallel’d Cruelty of these cruel and hard hearted pretended *Christians*.” Again, the pointed juxtaposition of Christian and Muslim slavery is new in the arsenal of antislavery arguments, but it is an idea that would be repeated over and over again in the coming centuries. So too would be the idea that only “nominal,” “pretended,” or “supposed” Christians could support slavery.

Given the sort of socially middling following that Keith attracted, the final argument adds a grievance against the rich that some might wish to read as evidence of a class struggle at work in colonial politics. The fifth argument is that “Slaves and Souls of Men are some of the *Merchandize of Babylon* by which the Merchants of the Earth are made Rich.” One suspects that, had Keith’s party had a greater number of the wealthy among them, this argument would not have been given quite as much prominence. One hears the relish with which the pamphleteers, no doubt seeking a populist audience, inform their readers that “those Riches which [slave traders] have heaped together, through the cruel

Oppression of these miserable Creatures, will be a means to draw Gods Judgments upon them.” As is so often the case with a jeremiad, the threat of inevitable divine justice clashes somewhat with the demand that action is taken in the here and now, but this is hardly the point. While containing some cogent arguments against both slavery and the slave trade, many of which are expressed for the first time, this pamphlet seems ultimately more interested in the economic status of its free readers than in the condition of enslaved people.

While the pamphlet offers a fascinating insight into Pennsylvanian politics in the late seventeenth century, it tells us less about how seriously antislavery ideas were taken in the colony. We know little about contemporary reception of the pamphlet, but we do know that it was at least available to those with an interest in the topic. Five years after its publication, in 1698, the geographer Gabriel Thomas noted in a discussion of Keith’s politics that Keith commanded that Quakers “should set their *Negroes* at Liberty after some reasonable time of Service.” Fifteen years after that, in his roundup of extant antislavery publications, John Hepburn remarked that “There was another Paper printed by (I think) *G. Keith* his party at *Philadelphia*.” Clearly, the pamphlet had entered into the public discourse of the colony and for that reason, though now less celebrated than the Germantown Protest, it has a better claim to significance despite the fact that, as the offering of a schismatic group, the pamphlet could easily have been ignored by mainstream Quakers in the colony and, on the whole, probably was. Certainly, there was no rush to emancipate slaves after the pamphlet’s appearance, but, as we shall see, after 1693 antislavery sentiment becomes a persistent and increasingly less minor element of public discourse in Pennsylvania. Since the *Exhortation and caution to Friends* was clearly available to those in Philadelphia who sought it out, we should not, as Thomas Drake does, dismiss it too quickly as having “little influence.”²³

A Debate and a Resolution

J. William Frost has argued that the Keithian controversy stymied debate among Friends on the status of slaves for many years. “Reforms

espoused by Keith," he argues, "such as freeing slaves or requiring a confession of faith before membership, were now beyond the pale of discussion. . . . Not until the 1750s did Friends as a body consider whether their commitment to the gospel and their political and economic power were irreconcilable." The 1750s were indeed a crucial decade for the Quaker debate over slavery, but it is a considerable exaggeration to say that discussion of antislavery was "beyond the pale" between 1693 and 1750. Although the Philadelphia Quaker leadership did not reach an unequivocal antislavery position until 1754, and did not give their professions of antislavery any teeth until 1758, there was nevertheless an almost continuous debate after 1693 on the problem of slavery that involved both "eccentric" and "orthodox" Friends and which had resulted, by the late 1690s, in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting having nominally come out against slave trading, even if it refrained from enforcing its decision. Nevertheless, although there was clearly a debate taking place in this period, the evidence of it we have is intermittent, and the texts—letters and minutes of meetings—occupy an intermediate zone between public and private discourse.²⁴

It is impossible to determine the actual degree of influence of any single piece of writing we have. Letters to meetings would be unlikely to stand alone but would accompany and provoke discussion. More frustrating even than a brief letter is a briefer comment in the minutes of a meeting that a discussion took place or that a paper was read. For example, the clerk of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1696 noted that "Several papers have been Read Relating to y^e Keeping & bringing in of Negros." Of these, only one, by Cadwalader Morgan, has survived (and is discussed below). Elsewhere, we read in the minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting that on the thirtieth of the seventh month, 1698, "a paper of Penticott Teage was read relating to the Selling of Negroes at the publick market place and outcry, and it is the sense of this meeting, that friends ought not to sell them after this manner." The paper is lost, and of the discussion that it provoked, no record was taken. Despite the assurances of Thomas Drake, we cannot be in any way certain that the "manner" in which the slaves were sold in fact "shocked the consciences of many Friends and revolted their sense of propriety" or even that this was an antislavery protest at all. In short, all we have are

fragments of a debate, the context and significance of which are often unclear. What is abundantly clear, however, is that a debate was certainly in progress. These remaining fragments are not, for the most part, notable for the quality of their rhetoric, but they do give us a sense of the discussion as it slowly played out in Quaker meetings and communities. In many cases they return to the fears and concerns expressed more formally by the Germantown Protesters and the Keithian pamphleteers, albeit often in unexpected ways.²⁵

A case in point is the letter written to, or at least received by, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1696 on behalf of the Welsh Quaker Cadwalader Morgan of Meirion, a village about six miles from Philadelphia. This letter has survived, although another apparently written at the same time by William Southeby, whose antislavery efforts are explored in more detail in Chapter 3, has not. Morgan's letter was either taken down by an amanuensis or translated from Welsh into English by another since Morgan tells us he would have written more "If I could write my Self." It contains a testimony that is essentially personal, as he recounts his struggle with his conscience as to whether or not he should buy a slave. His central point of anxiety has little to do with any concerns over the welfare of the enslaved person he is considering purchasing, nor does he seem to worry whether the slave was a victim of kidnapping or an unjust war. Instead, he is concerned first that he might be driven to the necessity to commit an act of violence and thereby break his Quaker vows of nonviolence and, second, that his household might become a scene of wickedness. While he was in the process of shopping for a slave, he recalls, "the Consideration of it came before me, If I Should have a bad one of them, that must be Corrected, Or would Run away, Or when I went from home, & Leave him with a woman or Maid, and he Should desire or Seek to Comitt Wickedness, If Such a thing happened that it would be more Loss and Trouble to me, Then any outward Gain could Countervail." Morgan's doubts about slavery are thus curiously solipsistic, but in this he was (paradoxically) not entirely alone. As we have seen, the Germantown Protesters metonymically invoked the specter of a slave rebellion to argue that the violence necessary to prevent slave rebelliousness more generally was incompatible with Quaker principles. Here, Morgan is coming to the

same conclusion but via a more personal route and without recourse to the scriptural interpretation that is a hallmark of the earlier discussions. Indeed, it is a moot point whether Morgan had access to those discussions. While his stance seems grounded in personal conviction, he does conclude his letter by emphasizing exactly that point, explaining that "it has been thus with me about two years ago, at which time I had not heard of others writeing abt. it, and If I could write my Self, I had written it more at Large when it Came to me." The implication is that in the two years since having had the personal experience that convinced him against slavery, he has read, or at least heard about, the writings of others on the subject. Whether these included the Germantown and Keithian documents we do not know. It is thus difficult to tell how far Morgan's protest is connected to wider Quaker discourses about slavery at this point or, in Drake's words, how genuinely naive "Morgan's homely disclosure of the workings of the Quaker conscience" actually was.²⁶

Either way, the protest was not entirely unsuccessful. The result, recorded in the minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for 1696, show that the sense of the meeting was "that ffrriends be Carefull not to Encourage the bringing in any more Negros, and y^t Such as have Negros be Carefull of them, bring them to Meetings, or have Meetings wth them In their ffamilyls, & Restrane them from loose, and Lewd Living as much as In them lyes, & from Rambling abroad on ffirst dayes or other times." This minute is probably the first institutional attempt to limit slave trading in America, although it is not difficult to point out, as Jean Soderlund does, that this advice "had no teeth for disciplining slave owners and traders" or, as Sydney James has noted, that "the special meetings for Negroes lasted only a short time and were not revived until 1756." Probably, despite this early piece of advice, very few enslaved people converted to Quakerism during the entire period covered by this book. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the advice does not tally with the requests of Cadwalader Morgan but, more significantly, with the writing of George Fox in *Gospel family-order* in that it specifies that slaves are part of the family. Although Friends were free to follow or ignore these suggestions as they wished, it is nonetheless clear that Fox's ameliorationist philosophy had by this time emerged as a significant

document of Quaker policy toward slavery. Though at a remove, the Barbadian experience had finally caught up with Philadelphian Friends.²⁷

The relationship between Philadelphian and Barbadian Friends may well have been strained by this new perception. Much of Philadelphia's trade was with the Caribbean, and Friends both communicated and did business together. It may, therefore, have surprised Barbadian Quakers to have received a letter from Philadelphia informing them that:

It haveng been the sence of our yearly meeting that many negroes in these parts may prove prejudissial several ways to us and our posterety, it was agreed that endeavors should be used to put a stop to the importing of them, and in order theyrunto that those friends that have correspondencies in y^e West Indies should discuredg y^e sending any more hither; notwithstanding which, many negroes have been brought in this last summer, our meting takin it into consideration thought fit to signifie the same to you, desiring that friends off your Island in general might be acquainted therywith and its y^e request of our said meetings that no more negroes may be sent to this River to Friends or others.²⁸

This letter, or one very like it, appears to have been drafted late in 1698 by the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, since the intention to draft a letter “to Friends of the monthly meetings in Barbados” was expressed in the minutes of the Monthly Meeting for September 1698, shortly after having heard the now lost “paper of Penticott Teage. . . relating to the Selling of Negroes at the publick market place.” Significantly, the reason given in 1698 was neither the Golden Rule nor the assertion of African humanity, but merely that Philadelphian Quakers felt that slaves “are too numerous here.” Opposition to slavery was not always motivated by the purest humanitarianism.²⁹

This “trew copy off ye paper sent” is quoted at the end of a protest against slavery written by Robert Pile, which may also have been read at this meeting. If it was, the clerk kept no record of it, but that does not

mean that it did not circulate informally. The protest is unusual for Quaker antislavery writing, although not for Quaker writing more generally, in that about half the argument is presented as a dream vision. It begins more prosaically, as Pile describes encountering the problem in similar circumstances to Morgan. "Sum time past theyr was sum inclination upon my mind to buy a negro, or negroes," Pile writes, "but theyr arose a question in mee, y^e lawfulness theyr of under ye Gospel ministration remembering the command of Christ Jesus, Do unto all men as ye would have all man doe unto you." Like Morgan, Pile is a prospective buyer, considering the morality of the purchase he is about to make. Unlike Morgan, Pile's meditations lead him straight to the Golden Rule and from there to many of the same objections to slavery that were expressed by the Germantown and Keithian Protesters. Pile's language is so eccentric that it is impossible to see whether he is referring to or quoting from either of these, but the opening half of the paper almost mirrors the Germantown Protest in structure, moving from the Golden Rule to the suspicion that slave trading is inherently man-stealing, and finally to the fear that the slaves "might rise in rebellion and doe us much mischief; except we keep a malisha; which is against our principles." Up to this point, one could safely argue that the Germantown Protest was Pile's model. Abruptly, however, there is a shift in the narration as Pile describes a dream in which "black potts" and ladders are ascribed symbolic values:

As I was lieng upon my bed as in a sleep I saw myself and a friend going on a road, and by y^e roadside I saw a black pott. I took it up, y^e friend said give mee part, I said no, I went a little farther and I saw a great ladder standing exact upright, reaching up to heaven up which I must go to heaven with y^e Pott in my hand intending to carry y^e black Pott with me, but y^e ladder standing so upright, and seeing no man holding of it up, it seemed y^t it would fall upon mee; at which I steps down and laid y^e pot at y^e foot of y^e ladder, and said them y^t will take it might, for I found work enough for both hands to take hold of this ladder, it being so exact upright; at y^e foot of this ladder I saw a man that gave those that goeth

up this ladder sumthing to refresh them. At this sight I was concerned, and asked the man what this ladder was. Hee said y^e light of Christ Jesus, and whoever it bee that his faith bee strong in y^e lord, God will uphold that it shall not fall; upon which I awoke and consider this matter, and I found it self must bee left behind, and to lett black negroes or pots alone.³⁰

Pile's account of his dream is susceptible to a variety of interpretations. Jean Soderlund, for example, argues that the dream "in which blacks were represented by a 'black pot' that must be set aside in order to reach heaven, had racist overtones that were absent in the writings of other Quaker abolitionists." By contrast, psychoanalytic critics such as Mechael Sobel have drawn attention to the sexual symbolism inherent in laying, or laying aside, yonic pots at the feet of phallic ladders. Others, such as Carla Gerona, would place the dream in the context of the long history of dream literature in the Judeo-Christian tradition, reaching back to the Book of Genesis. Indeed, the archetype for Pile's dream is clearly Genesis 28:12–17; the moment where Jacob, fleeing his brother Esau's murderous rage, lies down to sleep with a stone for a pillow. There, "he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." From the top of the ladder, God appears to Jacob and renews the vow that Jacob's descendants would "be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." To mark the event, Jacob set up the stone he used as a pillow as a pillar, and named the location "Bethel" or "House of God." Pile would of course have known this text well, and would no doubt have recognized the correlation between Jacob's Bethel, and the village of Bethel, Pennsylvania, in which he lived.³¹

Pile may also have been aware that different biblical scholars had interpreted Jacob's dream very differently. Whether or not he was describing an actual dream, the text to which he alludes was both notoriously unclear and exceptionally familiar. This gives his dream vision a double utility in that it resonates deeply with Christian readers without committing them to a preconceived notion of the meaning of the text.

In the end, Pile's own interpretation of his dream comes down to a simple ascribing of symbolic values. The black pot represents a slave; the ladder the Christian faith. To grasp the ladder he needs both hands, and so he puts down the pot. The interpretation he brings is that one cannot hold on to Christian faith and be a slaveholder at the same time. To Pile, this interpretation may have seemed obvious, although, had it been a genuine dream, it would have been unlikely to have had such an obvious and practical application. Indeed, the political statement comes in the waking interpretation rather than inherently in the dream itself. Pile focuses on the blackness of the "black pot" to reach the conclusion that it is slavery that must be put aside in order to embrace Christian faith. Pile's contemporaries might well have been divided on whether the dream was a genuine working of the inward light and thus admissible evidence that slavery was wrong, or merely evidence that Pile had been wrestling with his conscience on the matter. For Pile, it is both formally and psychically the central testimony of his protest against slavery.

Having decided that buying slaves is not acceptable, Pile concludes his protest by considering what should be done with those slaves already owned by Friends. First, he proposes a program of amelioration. Slaves, he argues, should "be learned to read english and to put them forward to goe to meetings, and indevors used to convinc them y^e y^e witness of god might be reached in them." He then suggests that quarterly meetings should be empowered to emancipate slaves, but not before they have turned a profit. Slaves should go free, he suggests, only "provided y^e maister bee not too much loss and y^e servant have not been time enough to Answer his maister." This triple strategy of amelioration, conversion, and emancipation "after a considerable Term of Years" is essentially a restatement of George Fox's position in *Gospel family-order*, and in part a restatement of the advice given by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting two years earlier. In theory, the Monthly Meeting should have very strongly reasserted the Yearly Meeting's position, but if that was Pile's hope he would have been disappointed. The Monthly Meeting did agree to write to Barbados, as we have seen, asking Barbadian Friends not to send slaves to Philadelphia. They also advised that "it is the sense of this Meeting that all masters of families among friends to endeavour to bring their Negroes to the publick Meetings of worship on the first

days.” Conversion was strongly enjoined, but of eventual emancipation not a word was spoken.³²

This first antislavery debate was not yet quite over. Two years later, in the spring of 1700, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting was asked to consider the matter once more. This time, the request came from no less a figure than “our dear Friend and Governor,” William Penn. Apparently the question of slaves had “lain upon his mind for some time,” and he reminded Quakers that they “ought to be very carefull in discharging a Good conscience toward them in all respects, but more especially for the good of their Souls.” Another practical step was taken and William Southeby, who had protested against slavery in 1696, was appointed to institute a “meeting for the Negro’s to be kept once a month.” Later that year, as Frost has shown, a Quaker minister called George Gray presented “A Testimony for Family Meeting and keeping Nigro as Servants” to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Gray, Frost notes, had lived in Barbados between 1666 and 1692 before moving to Philadelphia, and this is an important context for his “Testimony.” Gray does not call for an end to slavery, but he does reiterate calls made by George Fox, William Edmundson, and others that slaves be educated in Quaker principles and be restrained from “rude” behavior. His reasoning is clearly based on Edmundson’s. As we saw in Chapter 1, Edmundson had argued to Governor Atkins that the Barbados Slave Code was morally faulty, “*giving* [slaves] *Liberty in that which God restrain’d, and restraining them in that which God allow’d and afforded to all Men.*” The account of the conversation was not published until 1715. This means that when Gray wrote in 1700 that “other places abroad have had experience that have Restrained them from Good and have given Liberty in that which is evill,” his source must have been Edmundson’s oral account. This provides further evidence that the written Quaker antislavery texts that have survived reflect a much larger spoken conversation that was taking place throughout the Quaker world.³³

Frost argues that Gray’s influence was instrumental in convincing the Overseers of the Press to publish an edition of Fox’s *Gospel family-order* in 1701. The reissue of Fox’s book on slavery, he suggests, allowed the Quaker leadership to draw a line under the debate because “it offended no one and had something for everyone.” As Frost himself

notes, this strategy, if indeed it was a deliberate strategy, was initially successful, as slavery was not publically debated again by Delaware Valley Quakers for over a decade (or, if it was, no record was kept). Nevertheless, although Quakers appeared for a time to have accepted the status quo, antislavery was now a discursive reality in the colony of Pennsylvania, amply illustrated by the Overseers' attempt to counter discourse with discourse. Gray's allusion to Edmundson's spoken discourse and the reappearance of Fox's written discourse showed that, after a quarter of a century, the Barbados debates were alive in Philadelphia. To these were added thoughts and words from Quakers of many other backgrounds. By 1700, it had been publicly argued that slavery was against the Golden Rule, that it ran contrary to Quaker principles of nonviolence, that the slave trade was complicit with man-stealing and warmongering, that scripture compelled slaveholders to free slaves after a time and required others to give runaway slaves sanctuary, and that the whole business of slavery was an intolerable cruelty. In no other place in the Atlantic world had such arguments been repeatedly made in the central decision-making forums of local communities. By the end of the seventeenth century, therefore, Quakers in the Delaware Valley had established, shared, and repeated a coherent and consistent set of rhetorical maneuvers that could be used to argue against slavery and the slave trade. While Pennsylvanian Friends may not have been ready in 1700 to take the radical action against slavery that their rhetoric implied, there would have been few in the colony who were not aware that such an action was a distinct, if distant, possibility.³⁴

CHAPTER THREE

“The grief of divers friends”

PENNSYLVANIA—LONDON—NEW JERSEY,

1711–19

BY THE START OF THE eighteenth century, Quakers in Pennsylvania had heard a range of arguments against slaveholding and slave trading. These arguments had led to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting declaring that buying slaves should not be encouraged. Opposition to slave trading in this period can thus be viewed as a distinct position taken by a small but appreciable number of relatively influential Friends in and around Philadelphia. These individuals backed up their position by reference to a small but appreciable number of written texts. Although it would be decades before it would become the official firm “policy” of Quakers in the colony, there can have been few Delaware Valley Friends in the first decade of the eighteenth century who were not aware that slave trading, and even slaveholding itself, had been challenged and could be challenged again. Antislavery sentiment may not yet have crystallized into political reality, but by this stage it already had a discursive existence.

Published Quaker literature on the subject of slavery is thin on the ground for the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it is clear from manuscript records of monthly and yearly meetings in the Delaware Valley that Friends there had not stopped debating the problem of slavery. Legislation passed by the Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania Assembly in 1712 levying punitive duties on the importation of slaves even suggests that they were trying to extend their powers

to prevent the slave trade from expanding in the colony. This was matched in 1713 by unexpectedly strong advice from London that importing African slaves was neither “commendable nor allowed.” This chapter argues, however, that public demonstrations of antislavery sentiment may well have masked rearguard actions to silence antislavery friends while maintaining the illusion of taking them seriously. It begins, therefore, with a reading of the records of these meetings and debates, in part to establish what actually were the positions of meeting house and assembly in colonial Pennsylvania, but in part to reconstruct, as far as is possible from the limited traces remaining, the tone and substance of the debate taking place. The second half of the chapter discusses the important work of the New Jersey Quaker John Hepburn, who produced the first substantial Quaker antislavery text in 1714, before concluding with a brief look at the ways in which antislavery sentiment was articulated in the last years of the 1710s.

A First Attempt to Halt the Slave Trade?

Although there is no surviving record to indicate that the Philadelphia Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meetings paid any attention to slavery between 1700 and 1711, a lively debate on the status of slaves in the colony was nevertheless clearly under way at the highest levels of Philadelphia society. The men who attended Quaker meetings were in many cases the same men who attended the Assembly of Pennsylvania in the first decades of the eighteenth century. In the crucial year of 1712, for example, more than a quarter of the assembly members also attended the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. As legislators, these Friends framed a series of laws dealing with slavery. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed several excise and duty regulations that could be used to encourage or discourage trade, including the trade in slaves. They also passed a number of acts defining the rights (if any) and the duties of slaves, and the legal processes to which they were subject. Thus, Pennsylvania was no different from any other British American colony in establishing a slave code. In Jean Soderlund’s words, this “was not as harsh as those of other colonies but was perhaps more

stringent than one would expect in the Quaker province.”¹ In November 1700, the Assembly passed an “Act for the better regulation of servants in this province and territories,” which distinguished between white servants, who could be punished by being compelled to work for extra months or years “after the expiration of his or her time,” and black servants, whose time in servitude did not expire, and who would thus be “severely whipped in the most public place of the township where the offence was committed.” This is the first time a legal distinction is drawn between white indentured servants and black chattel slaves in Pennsylvanian law. This distinction was codified more clearly later on the same day in “An act for the trial of Negroes,” in which a slave code in all but name was created for Pennsylvania. The Act set up separate courts for African slaves and specified punishments, usually either death or thirty-nine lashes, for crimes such as murder and burglary. It also specified the number of lashes to be given for a variety of activities that in the minds of the colonists threatened public order. These included carrying a club or other weapon without a license (twenty-one lashes) and gathering together in groups “above the number of four in company” (thirty-nine lashes). These rules appeared to apply to the entire black population of Pennsylvania, not just enslaved Africans. In its original form, the law was rejected by the Privy Council, which at that time maintained oversight of all colonial laws, since Privy Counsellors objected to its provision for the castration of slaves who attempted rape. This was amended to thirty-nine lashes and branding on the forehead with the letter “R.” With some other minor alterations, the Act was passed in January 1705/6. It remained unaltered until 1726.²

Legislation was also passed to regulate, or at least to influence, the conduct of slave traders. Historians have sometimes claimed that the levies imposed on the importation of slaves by the Pennsylvania Assembly between 1700 and 1712 amounted to an attempt to abolish the slave trade altogether. Edward Turner notes that “in 1712 the Assembly very boldly passed an act to prevent importation.” Thomas Drake asserts that “in a burst of enthusiasm, Pennsylvania prohibited the importation of slaves altogether.” The facts are somewhat more sobering. In November 1700, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed “An Act for granting an impost upon wines, rum, beer, ale, cider, &c.,

imported, retailed and sold in this province and territories.” Tucked away at the end of section two of the Act there is a levy of twenty shillings on the importation of each slave. This is a moderate sum that, in the absence of any clear statement of intent in the Act, could be interpreted either as an attempt to cash in on an increasing branch of trade or as an attempt to mildly discourage the trade. Five years later, in January 1705/6, the Assembly doubled the levy on imported slaves to forty shillings. Unlike the Act of 1700, the framers of this document outlined their intentions in the Act’s title, stating that they had created a law “for granting an impost and laying an excise on sundry liquors and negroes imported into this province for the support of government and defraying the necessary public charges in the administration thereof.” Unless the legislators were deliberately seeking to disguise their underlying moral purpose in relation to slavery, which is not likely, this is an Act framed for the economic benefit of the colony, and not for the good of the enslaved. The same seems true of the “Impost Act,” passed in February 1710/11, which confirmed the duty on slaves as forty shillings. On the surface, this seems to indicate that the Assembly’s views on slavery had remained unchanged. If the order of an item’s appearance in a list is any indication of the importance accorded to the item by the compiler of the list, however, it seems that slaves have become either a more significant source of revenue by 1710, or a more pressing concern. The title of the 1700 Act did not mention them at all. By 1705, they came last of a long list of taxable imports. The title of the 1710/11 “Impost Act, laying a duty on negroes, wine, rum, and other spirits, cider and vessels” places them first.³

By the end of 1711, therefore, the Pennsylvania Assembly appears to have adopted a somewhat self-serving approach to the slave trade: taxing slave imports heavily, but not prohibitively, and pocketing a share of the profits. Without external prompting, this arrangement is unlikely to have changed significantly since it threatened no vested interests and it materially benefited the colony’s exchequer. Somewhat surprisingly, in May 1712 an external challenge did in fact emerge. The *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania* records that, on 8 May 1712:

A Petition, signed by *William Southbe*, relating to *Negroes*, was read and ordered to lie on the Table.

A petition signed by many of the Inhabitants of this Province, praying the Prohibition of *Negroes*, was read, and ordered to lie on the Table.

The text of these petitions has not survived, but William Southeby, whose efforts against slavery had been ongoing since at least 1696, was clearly calling for the emancipation of all slaves in the colony, while the “many inhabitants” had the less radical goal of banning the entry of new slaves into the colony. This much is clear from the Assembly’s response to the two petitions, which came the following day:

And to *William Southbe’s* Petition, relating to the Enlargement of *Negroes*, the House is of Opinion, it is neither just nor convenient to set them at Liberty.

Also to the Petition for discouraging the Importation of *Negroes* (sign’d by many Hands) the House agrees, that an Impost of *Twenty Pounds per* head be laid on all *Negroes* imported into this Province; and that the Clerk provide a Bill, and bring the same to this House.⁴

The Assembly clearly had no time for Southeby’s radical proposals to “enlarge”—set free—the colony’s slaves, but together the two petitions caused the members of the Assembly to change their minds overnight about the colony’s position on slave trading. By 14 May, the bill had been prepared. It was debated and committed the following day and passed on 7 June 1712. Some careful reading of this act is required. It is important to note that its stated purpose was explicitly an attempt to “prevent,” and not to prohibit, “the importation of Negroes and Indians” into Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the levy of £20 the Assembly imposed on the importation of each slave was prohibitive, and that had the law been enforced it would effectively have put an end to legal slave trading into Pennsylvania. It would not, however, have made either slave trading or slaveholding illegal within the colony, nor is there any evidence to suggest that the latter, at least, was a goal of the Assembly.⁵

Reading the Act, there is a temptation to presume that this was an early triumph for the gathering forces of antislavery, particularly since the two petitions that prompted it seem to have been coordinated by William Southeby, whose long-standing moral objection to slavery was well known. Southeby, who began life as an American-born Catholic in Maryland, converted to Quakerism as early as the 1660s. By 1685, he had moved to Philadelphia, where he bought land in the new city and became a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly by 1688. He was active in the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting from 1685 until his death in 1720 and, from the 1690s onward, was increasingly outspoken against both slaveholding and slave trading. While it is possible that Southeby had genuinely pricked the conscience of the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1712, there are equally good reasons to believe that the Assembly's dramatic move was grounded in self-interest. Indeed, it appears likely that Southeby submitted his own petition, and probably prompted the more popular one, to ride a wave of antislavery anxiety precipitated by the April 1712 slave uprising in New York, in which a group of slaves killed eight white colonists, injured several more, and burned down a number of buildings.⁶ This anxiety is articulated in the opening of the Act:

Whereas divers plots and insurrections have frequently happened, not only in the islands but on the mainland of America, by negroes, which have been carried on so far that several of the inhabitants have been thereby barbarously murdered, an instance whereof we have lately had in our neighboring colony of New York; and whereas the importation of Indian slaves hath given our neighboring Indians in this province some umbrage of suspicion and dissatisfaction; for prevention of all which for the future:

[Section I.] Be it enacted . . . that from and after the publication of this act, upon the importation of any negro or Indian, by land or water, into this province, there shall be paid by the importer, owner or possessor thereof, the sum of twenty pounds per head for every negro or Indian so imported.

The first half of the Act's preamble clearly articulates a rhetoric of alarm rather than of moral indignation. With its apparent desire to persuade the community at large of its own necessity, by placing emphasis on recent shocking events, and by evoking the "barbarity" of the New York rebels, it seems somewhat insecure and uncertain of its purpose. It has, indeed, all the hallmarks of legislation hurriedly prepared in the wake of a crisis. The second half may also reflect alarm, particularly if the "dissatisfaction" of Native Americans had led to or threatened violence against colonists, although in general relations between colonists and Native Americans in Pennsylvania were relatively peaceable at this time. Here, though, there is more in the way of precedent, since an almost identically phrased "act to prevent the importation of Indian slaves" had been passed in January 1705/6, but without the levy of £20. Instead, Native American slaves brought into the colony from elsewhere would be "set at liberty." In both cases, however, self-preservation is the reason given by the legislators for framing the Act. Neither altruism, nor a desire to enshrine the Golden Rule in law, are major considerations.⁷

Colonial legislation could not be enacted without the final authority of the Privy Council in London. No doubt they detected the whiff of panic for, on 20 February 1713/14, the Privy Council rejected the Act. In a report written in December 1713, the Solicitor-General Robert Raymond drew attention to the, at the time, excessive powers that the Act provided for, noting that it "gives a power to break open houses to search upon suspicion of Negroes being there Generally, which Extends to Night as well as Day, which power is rarely admitted by our Law in offences of an inferior nature." Although giving his legal opinion, Raymond pointedly refrained from reaching any conclusions about the impact the Pennsylvanian law would have on trade. "How far this Act may interfere with the Brittish Interest as to their Trading in Negroes," he wrote, "your Lopp's [Lordships] are most proper Judges." He had no real need to draw attention to the issue of trade. In September 1711, following a summer of secret negotiations, the British had secured the *Asiento*: the right to supply Spanish America with slaves. British commercial policy was thus to expand slave trading as far as possible, and no colonial law that sought, for whatever reason, to impede this policy could be allowed to stand. William Penn, used to interceding

with government on behalf of his colony, was “preoccupied and ill” and “no help at all” while the law was being considered by the Privy Council—he had suffered a stroke—but it would be a mistake to think that “his valuable connections at court” could have swayed the Privy Council in the slightest. The *Asiento* was a far bigger prize than the colony of Pennsylvania.⁸

We are thus left with an important question about the attempt of 1712 to discourage slave trading to Pennsylvania. News that the *Asiento* had been secured was made public in London in December 1711, allowing a full six months for the information to reach Philadelphia. Unless they were spectacularly naive, or particularly badly informed, and there is no evidence to suggest that either of those were true, the members of the Pennsylvania Assembly must have realized that the Act had no chance of getting past the Privy Council. The question is, therefore, why did they bother to frame it at all? In this, we come across the thorny problem of intentionality. We know that the stated intentions of the Assembly were to prevent “plots and insurrections” by slaves and the “umbrage of suspicion and dissatisfaction” among Native Americans, and, as we have seen, this was a self-interested action, not an altruistic one. But other commentators have seen things differently. Thomas Drake, for example, holds the view that the shift from discussion in meetings to the raising of levies on slaves by the Assembly suggests that after 1700 “Quakers had turned from religious to civil action.” In other words, he implies that after 1700, the Quaker community as a whole had embraced antislavery and had changed from trying to enforce their beliefs within their own community to imposing them on all who entered the colony. This is a large claim, and one that does need some examination, because the *Act to prevent the importation of Negroes* coincided with a resurgence of antislavery activity in monthly meetings as well as in the Yearly Meeting. It is arguable, therefore, that antislavery Quakers were working in concert, and with some success, to bring the slavery question to the fore.⁹

Records of discussions in Quaker meetings for this period are sparse and give little idea of how precisely the sense of the meeting was reached. It is not easy to read between the lines of these minutes, but doing that is nevertheless the only possible way of gaining new insights

into the process that was taking place. As Jean Soderlund has shown, much of the impetus of the antislavery drive in the 1710s came from Chester Monthly Meeting. The Quakers of Chester, a small town to the southwest of Philadelphia, decided at their Quarterly Meeting in September 1711 that they were opposed to any extension of the slave trade in Pennsylvania. Their thoughts were passed up to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which, “after a due consideration of the matter,” advised that “friends may be careful according to a former minuit of the Yearly Meeting 1696 not to encourage the bringing in of any more [slaves].” Thus, at the final Philadelphia Yearly Meeting before the Pennsylvania Assembly passed the *Act to prevent the importation of Negroes*, Quakers had been reminded that it was their duty to discourage the importation of “Negroes and Indians” into the colony. This reminder may have been relatively fresh in the minds of the Assembly members as they considered the legislation they were framing. Just in case it was not, Southeby no doubt reiterated the reminder when he petitioned the Assembly on 8 May 1712. Southeby, but more crucially the Yearly Meeting, appeared to have created an atmosphere in which the Quaker-dominated colonial assembly had to be seen to be supporting the advice of 1696, and this may explain why it decided overnight to pass a law that was certain to be rejected by the Privy Council. The Pennsylvania Assembly had been seen to act, and the responsibility for whether the slave trade would be legally encouraged or discouraged in Pennsylvania had now passed out of their hands. Rather than being enacted in a “burst of enthusiasm,” the law was almost certainly framed as an exercise in political obfuscation.¹⁰

A Transatlantic Exchange of Views

Passing the buck is an old political game, and the Quaker leadership of 1712 were clearly adepts. A few months after the Pennsylvania Assembly had passed the *Act to prevent the importation of Negroes*, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting again discussed slavery, and this time decided that the matter was “too weighty” even for them. Thus began an exchange on the subject between the Philadelphia and London Yearly Meetings, which was notable for the lack of enthusiasm even from those who initiated

the exchange. The letter sent from Philadelphia to London in 1712 has the appearance of being drawn up by a committee of people who do not agree and who have had to find a form of language acceptable to all. It begins by acknowledging that a debate on slavery has been taking place “for many years,” but it refuses to reveal the extent of that debate, mentioning only that the matter concerned “some of our Brethren.” This evasiveness is telling. Had the group been very small, the letter would probably not have been written in the first place. On the other hand, had the group been large it seems likely that the letter would have proclaimed that it contained the views of the majority and thus made its points more assertively. Instead, it expresses doubt, shows evidence of dissension, and passes responsibility to a higher body. The matter, Philadelphia informs London:

Was laid before this meeting many years ago, and the thing in some degree discouraged, as may appear by a minuit of our yearly meeting 1696 desiring all Merchants and Traders professing Truth amongst us to write to their Correspondents that they send no more Negroes to be disposed of as above. Yet Notwithstanding as our settlements increased so other Traders flocked in among us over whom we had no Gospel authority, and such have increased and multiplied Negroes amongst us to the grief of divers Friends, whom we are willing to ease if the way might open clear to the satisfaction of the general, and it being last yearly meeting again moved and Friends being more concerned with Negroes in divers other provinces and places than in these—We thought it rather too weighty—to come to a full conclusion therein.¹¹

The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting attempts to show that it is maintaining strong discipline by blaming the problem on “other traders,” a point that would not require emphasis were it actually true. There are further signs of internal dissension. According to the letter, the increase in slaves provokes “the grief of divers Friends.” We should note that the writers use the quantitatively vague adjective “divers” rather than a more

affirmative term such as “the majority” or even merely “many.” That these “divers Friends” are a minority is confirmed when the Meeting expresses the desire to meet (“ease”) their demands, but only if it can be done “to the satisfaction of the general,” that is, to the satisfaction of the majority. The community implied is Friends in the Delaware Valley, but, a little later, the letter considers the international Quaker community, particularly those in American and Caribbean colonies to the south, where Friends were more deeply involved in slavery. Again, this maneuver shifts blame away from themselves. Under the guise of seeking consultation and deferring to a greater power, it also shifts responsibility for solving the problem. The letter concludes with a request that the London Yearly Meeting offer its “Sence or advice” but only “after having advised with Friends of the other American Provinces.”

Curiously, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting neglected to mention in this letter that the Pennsylvania Assembly had recently passed the *Act to prevent the importation of Negroes*. The omission is troubling since it is a major piece of relevant information that may well have changed the view of the London Yearly Meeting considerably. There is the possibility that the London Meeting knew about the Act from other sources, although, as we have seen, the government did not begin to consider it until late in 1713, by which time the London Friends had already replied to the Philadelphia Friends. In either case, the omission suggests either that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting wanted to distance itself from the views of the Assembly in the matter of slavery or that it wanted to present its own deliberations on the matter as being entirely independent. There could have been good reasons for them taking either of these positions, but ultimately everyone concerned must have known that the two bodies in fact had a very close relationship. Indeed, this might hold the key to what was going on beneath the surface. The tone of evasion, the evidence of internal dissension, and the desire to shift responsibility in the letter, coupled with the puzzling omission of important and relevant information, suggest that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is attempting to give the appearance of distance from the Assembly, while actually working closely with them to undermine the position of the minority of antislavery Friends. Although it is impossible to prove unambiguously from the records, close reading strongly

suggests that there was a concerted effort by weighty Friends on both the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the Pennsylvania Assembly to silence a small but vocal group of antislavery Quakers by passing their grievances on to higher bodies, namely the London Yearly Meeting and the Privy Council, which they knew would be sure to reject them. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's letter even includes an insurance policy. By asking the London Meeting to reach a decision "after having advised with Friends of the other American Provinces," Philadelphia, which must have understood the position of slave-trading Friends in Virginia, Carolina, and Barbados perfectly well, have built failure into their request.

Traditionally, historians have seen the response to Philadelphia's letter, which the London Yearly Meeting sent in 1713, as "lukewarm," "evasive," and "equivocal," but in this context it seems stronger than antislavery Friends could have hoped for, given the unpropitious circumstances. These circumstances were worse than merely divided opinion in Philadelphia, and a government buoyed by the news of the *Asiento* in London. As Sydney James points out, Quakers in London were in the middle of delicate negotiations with the government "to sponsor legislation allowing them to affirm (rather than take oaths) in a form which would satisfy the consciences of English Quakers."¹² At the same time, Penn was negotiating the sale of his colony to the crown, a plan that fell through when he suffered a stroke. Clearly, antislavery Quakers in Philadelphia could have expected little from the London Meeting that might threaten the Friends' relationship with the metropolitan government. Nevertheless, although their response was mixed, London did endorse Philadelphia's 1696 advice that Quakers were to avoid slave trading, and they did so in stronger language than can be found in any of the records of official Quaker discussions of the issue up to that point. London's letter begins by admonishing the Philadelphia Quakers for the mixed message in their epistle, but it develops into a clear statement of policy:

Altho' you desire friends sense at y^e Same time you desire the Answer may be deferred untill we have advised with other Plantations, upon w^{ch} we would observe that you

had better first have made that your care and soe have stated y^e case Conjunctly, for want whereof we shall Say y^e Less, untill such time as it is more Generally Represented, only this we think meet to Impart unto you as y^e Sense of the Yearly Meeting, that y^e Importing them from their Native Country and Relations by ffriends is not a Commendable nor allowed Practice and we hope ffriends have been carefull to avoid y^e Same, Remembring y^e Command of our Blessed Lord ~ whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye Even so to them. Besides, y^e Multiplying of negro slaves among you may be of dangerous Consequences considering y^e Peaceable Principle we profess and you are not unsensible of some Instances that many be given of their Barbarity when opportunity has seemed to present unto them, and we desire you to consider whether your Children and white servants may not be Injured by keeping Such Slaves, learning them a Domineering Spirit, and using them as their Vassals, Extending Cruelty to them at their Pleasure w^{ch} to be sure ought to be avoided for they are humane kind—and as y^e Lord hath been and is Mercifull to us he Expects we should Extend Compassion to our fellow Creatures.¹³

A distinct tone of annoyance is detectable in London's reaction to Philadelphia's request that the London Meeting, not them, should consult with other colonies. London must have known what the likely position taken by Quaker meetings in the other colonies would be, and they must have realized that had Philadelphia consulted more widely, then they would not have had the need to trouble the London Meeting for their advice. Nevertheless, London do in fact give their advice, which is that importing slaves direct from Africa is neither "Commendable nor allowed." In other words, while by no means outlawing slaveholding, or even the purchasing of slaves born in the colonies, the letter offers the rather astonishing advice that participation in the Atlantic slave trade is from this point onward officially prohibited for Quakers everywhere. Although there is not much evidence that this advice was widely advertised, and even less evidence that it was actually enforced, it is

nonetheless clear that Quaker antislavery discourse is becoming increasingly solidified and centralized around the key point that the Atlantic slave trade itself is a primary objection.¹⁴

The remainder of the letter outlines the London Meeting's objections to both slave trading and to slaveholding more generally, and it is significant that most of the arguments they make are in accord with earlier colonial antislavery rhetoric. Their argument commences with an explicit appeal to the Golden Rule, which was first seen in the writing of George Fox and William Edmundson. Next comes the worry that slave resistance, here typified as "barbarity," might lead Friends to act contrary to the "Peaceable Principle": a worry that was first expressed by the Germantown Protesters of 1688. A third and related argument appears to be new: that keeping slaves instills a "Domineering Spirit" in the slaveholder and, more particularly, their children and "white servants," both of whom presumably were thought to have less self-control. The next point, that slaves are "humane kind," was first made at length by Fox. Their final point, that God "Expects we should Extend Compassion to our fellow Creatures," also originates with Fox, and is reiterated by the supporters of George Keith in their 1693 pamphlet. Clearly, the members of the London Meeting were familiar with Fox's views on slavery, and may also have participated more widely in early Quaker antislavery discourse, either by reading imported copies of the Keithian pamphlet, or by correspondence with Friends, and friends, who had attended colonial meetings where the issue was discussed. It should also be noted that both free and enslaved Africans were becoming more numerous in London itself, the majority in domestic service, and so discussion of slavery was not merely a colonial issue.¹⁵

Philadelphia's response, in a letter sent from the Yearly Meeting in October 1714, at last mentions the Pennsylvanian *Act to prevent the importation of Negroes* of 1712; "which Law," they note, "the Queen was pleased to disannull." The letter's tone is both pleading and defensive and the content is somewhat contradictory. Although they claim that they "know not of any friend amongst us that has any hand or Concern" in the Atlantic slave trade, they nonetheless "could heartily wish that a way might be found to stop the bringing more here, or at least that ffriends may be less concerned in Buying or Selling of any that may be brought

In.” Presumably, they are referring to Quaker slave traders from colonies other than Pennsylvania, although that would depend on the exact meaning we ascribe to the phrase “amongst us.” In either case, they imply that the failure of the 1712 Act to pass unscathed through the Privy Council was in part the fault of the London Quaker leadership when they express a “hope for your Assistance with the Government if any farther law should be made discouraging the Importation.” The passive-aggressive tone is compounded by the defensiveness of the letter’s concluding remarks on slavery. “We take the ffreedom to acquaint you,” they write, “that our Request unto you was, that you would be pleased to Consult or advise with ffriends in other Plantations where [slaves] are more numerous than with us, because they hold a Correspondence with you and not with us, and your meeting may better prevail with them and your advice prove more Effectual.” This sounds perfectly reasonable on a first reading, but, like many perfectly reasonable explanations, it masks the truth and hints at an underlying purpose. The “Correspondence” to which they refer is the epistle sent as a matter of procedure between yearly meetings in the colonies and the London Yearly Meeting. In the strictest institutional sense, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting did indeed keep a “Correspondence” with only the London Yearly Meeting and no other. Nevertheless, the reality was that Pennsylvanian Quakers maintained relationships and kept up correspondences with meetings across the New World. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting frequently wrote to other meetings in an official capacity, and the minutes of the Yearly Meeting in this period contain numerous references to letters written officially to meetings in Barbados, Jamaica, Rhode Island, Long Island, Maryland, and elsewhere. In addition, Philadelphia Quakers frequently wrote in a personal capacity to Friends in other colonies. There can be no doubt that this excuse is disingenuous, consciously or otherwise, and is arguably deliberately misleading. Bearing in mind that the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting failed to inform the London Yearly Meeting of the passage of the Act while there was still time for London to offer “Assistance with the Government,” and assuming that the Philadelphia Quakers were not so naive as to think that Barbadian and Jamaican Quakers would meekly fall in behind their antislavery efforts, one may easily come to the conclusion that the

intention from the start was to scupper the antislavery moves being promoted by a minority of Pennsylvanian Friends. At best, it was a fudge. At worst, it may have been a deliberate conspiracy. We may never know for certain, but what we can be sure about is that the attempt of 1712 to prohibit the importation of slaves emerged neither from a unanimous display of antislavery sentiment among Quakers, nor from any sudden altruistic “burst of enthusiasm.”¹⁶

The chiding tone of their 1713 letter to Philadelphia reveals that London must have understood on some level that Philadelphia was playing politics with them. Indeed, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting struggled over the following two years to contain what was clearly a serious internal dispute over the slavery question. At the same time, they attempted to reach a position that was consistent both with the advice of the London Meeting and with the obvious desire of the Quaker leadership not to prevent Quakers from participating in slaveholding or slave trading. In 1715, Chester Quarterly Meeting again brought the issue to the Yearly Meeting. On the evidence of the strained tone of the Yearly Meeting’s minutes, the discussion that followed was both lengthy and acrimonious. “Much debate being thereupon,” the clerk noted succinctly, “it is the sence of this meeting that friends avoid judging one another in this matter publicly or otherwise.” The Meeting then reasserted its advice of 1696, in which they had declared “that ffrriends be Carefull not to Encourage the bringing in any more Negroes, and y^t Such as have Negroes be Carefull of them, bring them to Meetings, or have Meetings wth them In their ffamilyls, & Restrane them from loose, and Lewd Living as much as In them lyes, & from Rambling abroad on ffirst dayes or other times.” The “Epistle to the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings” sent out in 1715 indeed restates this position but, recognizing the hostility that the debate was now occasioning, concludes with the plaintive appeal that “all do forbear judging or reflecting on one another either in publick or private concerning the detaining or keeping them Servants.”¹⁷

One may read this injunction as conciliation or as censorship. It is plain nonetheless that the attempt to resolve the dispute was a failure. The following year, Chester again brought the issue to the Yearly Meeting, complaining that the “former minuits and Orders [concerning

slaves] are not sufficient to discourage their importation, and therefore request that no Friends may buy any Negro Slaves, that may be imported for the future.” This unambiguous demand for an enforceable ruling perhaps predictably failed to prompt a ruling free of ambiguity. Again, the Yearly Meeting attempted to reach a compromise, probably more out of concern for the orderly conduct of the Meeting and for the public image of the Friends than out of any overriding concern for the welfare of enslaved people. As it had the previous year, the Meeting restated the ruling of 1696 before concluding with advice that bends over backward to avoid any sort of commitment. “In Condescension to such Friends as are streightned in their minds against the holding them,” the minute concludes, “it is desir’d that friends generally do as much as may be avoid buying such Negroes as shall hereafter be brought in, rather than offend any friends who are against it. Yet this is only caution and not Censure.” Words such as “generally” and “avoid” already carry little enough weight, and legitimize arguments that claim that, sometimes, special circumstances override general advice. The injunction to “avoid buying” slaves goes nowhere toward condemning slaveholding per se, or advocating emancipation. We do not hear any appeals to the Golden Rule in this statement, nor any assertions of the humanity of Africans. Indeed, the main reason given for developing these habits of avoidance is to forestall the danger of offending antislavery Friends. If these deeply ambivalent statements were not enough, the minute concludes by undercutting all its previous assertions with its clearest statement: “Yet this is only caution and not Censure.” The Chester Friends had failed to secure anything more from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting than a mild word of advice.¹⁸

At face value, the failure seems complete. For the second time, almost a decade of discussion of the problem of slavery had resulted in nothing more than a lukewarm restatement of what had already been established in the last decade of the seventeenth century. Given the seeming futility of the enterprise, it does not appear surprising that antislavery protests were no longer issued forth from Chester Meeting. Neither should it surprise us that, for more than a decade afterward, discussion of slavery seldom appears in the minutes of any Quaker meeting in the Delaware Valley. Nevertheless, the absence of records

does not prove the absence of a debate. Although acrimonious exchanges and spirited protests are not implied in the minutes of the 1719 Yearly Meeting, the topic was still clearly fresh enough for the spirit of the previous sets of advice to be codified in the Book of Discipline, updated that year, in which “it is desired, that Friends do not buy or sell Indian slaves. Also that none among us be concern’d in the fetching, or importing Negro slaves, from their own country or elsewhere.” If anything, this strengthens the Meeting’s stand on slave trading, particularly since the code of discipline, while encouraging “persuasion and gentle dealing” in the first instance, allowed ultimately for “censure or disowning” for those friends breaking its rules. Nevertheless, regardless of the sanctions now available to the Quaker community, as Jean Soderlund and J. William Frost have shown, Quakers, and in particular the wealthy Quakers who ran the colony, continued to own and to deal in slaves throughout the 1720s and beyond. Whether they did so without a twinge of conscience for the people they were buying and selling is unknowable, but we do know that they were bound by the decision of the Yearly Meeting to treat their slaves humanely (although what constituted humane treatment was left undefined) and to bring them to the knowledge of the Christian religion. Even if they ignored those injunctions, they were still bound, by the terms of the 1716 advice, to consider the feelings of antislavery Friends in the matter.¹⁹

This set of advice may not have meant much in practical terms, but it did mean that in all actions involving slaves, Pennsylvanian Quakers were encouraged to consider the justice and humanity of what they were doing. In other words, after 1716, each encounter with an enslaved person, and each transaction involving a slave, was to some extent informed by and conducted within the terms of a public discourse of antislavery. The compromise of 1716 was thus unstable from the start since it locked Quakers into modes of thought about slavery that encouraged a skeptical attitude and which tended to undermine confidence in the institution. While many Quakers quite clearly found ways of reconciling their consciences with the generalized advice to avoid dealing in slaves, it is just as clear that many did not. The Quaker community had been polarized, and while the “legislative” battle had been won by the conservative supporters of the existing system, the

discursive battle had been less obviously their victory. A rhetoric of anti-slavery had been articulated and partially endorsed at the highest levels of Quaker society. It could thereafter never be entirely silenced.

John Hepburn and the Golden Rule

At the height of Philadelphia's political agitation about slavery, John Hepburn, a Quaker from Middletown in New Jersey, produced the first major piece of antislavery writing in the Quaker tradition since George Keith's faction had published their *Exhortation and caution to Friends* in 1693. Hepburn's *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule, or, An Essay to prove the Unlawfulness of making Slaves of Men* was written in 1713–14 and published in 1715, and is the first of a series of tracts on various subjects that Hepburn variously wrote himself or republished from other sources, and which he issued together. Only the first three are concerned with slavery, including Hepburn's own *American Defence*, which opens the collection. The second tract is the anonymously authored *Arguments against making Slaves of Men*, while the third consists of a reprint of a short discussion of slavery from *The Athenian Oracle*, a London journal printed in 1704. "Taken together," David Brion Davis argues, "these remarkable essays answered virtually every pro-slavery argument that would appear during the next century and a half." Accordingly, the next two sections analyze Hepburn's antislavery trilogy, to show how the antislavery arguments they contained were becoming both theoretically and rhetorically more sophisticated in this period.²⁰

Hepburn opens his own tract with a survey of the state of the incipient slavery debate. He concludes that it is not extensive. Most antislavery writing, he laments, has probably been "destroyed by *Negro-Masters*, that the reader will find them almost as scarce to be found as the *Phenix Egg*." Given how much of the North American antislavery debate dating from before 1715 has to be recovered from minutes of meetings, Hepburn's estimate of the quantity of extant published writing seems accurate, even if his analysis of the cause of the paucity is unlikely. Nevertheless, given the extent of the debate that was taking place at the

time, his assertion that the practice of slavery had “been carried on almost in profound silence” suggests either that he was an unreliable observer of the current political processes of the Pennsylvanian Quaker community, or that he was at a distance from it. Middletown is in northern New Jersey, some seventy-five miles northeast of Philadelphia, and is in fact closer to New York than to Philadelphia. Hepburn may have traveled only rarely to Philadelphia, if at all, and we have no evidence of any correspondence he might have kept with inhabitants of the city. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to see the book as emerging from the public discourse of antislavery that was clearly being articulated in American Quaker circles at this time, especially since, as we saw in Chapter 2, Hepburn was aware of the Germantown Quakers’ attitude toward slavery.²¹

The book falls into four sections, which are not clearly differentiated in the text. The first contains three numbered arguments against slavery, although there are in fact at least four rhetorical movements taking place. The second offers a dialogue in the present between a “Negro Master” and a Turk, while the third depicts a future “Negro Master” in dialogue with a Christian. The book ends with an address to the reader, concluding remarks, and a short poem. *American Defence* thus offers early examples of a number of important techniques of anti-slavery rhetoric, not least antislavery verse, which later in the century would become an important tool of the British abolitionist movement and which, in the hands of poets such as John Greenleaf Whittier, would also play an important part in nineteenth-century American abolitionist discourse.

The book’s opening arguments move neatly from precept to example. “God hath given to man a Free-Will, so that he his Master of his own Choice,” Hepburn argues, “therefore we ought not to force and compel our fellow creatures, the Negroes.” Compelling anyone to do anything against one’s will is an “Anti-Christian Practice,” he reasons, since it “is a right down Contradiction” to the principle of free will. From God, Hepburn moves to Christ, “who commanded us, *To do to all men as we would they should do to us*, or as we would be done by.” This application of the Golden Rule is obvious to Hepburn: “the Tyranizing over and making Slaves of our Fellow Creatures, the Negroes, every one

knows, or may know, this is not the way they would be done unto." This is an interesting development since, while the Golden Rule had already been invoked by almost every Quaker writer on slavery, the question of free will had not yet been broached. Hepburn combines the two to provide what he sees as an unassailable doctrinal argument against slavery. "Now I have shown you," he argues, "*first*, That this Practice opposes God and his Attributes, and *2dly*, That it opposes Christ and his Command; And what is this in Effect but to bid Defyance and to live in Opposition to Christ and his Gospel? and it [*sic*] so, it is a high Degree of an Antichristian Life and Practice."²²

The argument is certainly elegant, but it is also rarefied. Hepburn tackles this by providing actual examples of the abusive nature of slavery, as well as ways in which the institution corrupts the slaveholder and violates the rights of the enslaved. For the first time in Quaker literature, Hepburn invokes and places together three archetypes which would resonate throughout antislavery literature for centuries to come. The first of these is the sadistic and blood-soaked planter, interested only in his own material gain. Hepburn characterizes "Negro-Masters" as men who "can afford to keep themselves with white hands, except at some Times they chance to be besparkled with the Blood of those poor Slaves, when they fall to beating them with their *twisted Hides* and *Horse-whips*, and other *Instruments of Cruelty*, too barbarous here to relate." Hepburn's violent imagery contrasts with the implied effeteness of the slaveholders' "white hands." Although the whiteness hints at racial difference, it is more likely that Hepburn wishes to emphasize that slaveholders are unused to manual labor. This criticism soon gives way to a more obviously gendered construction of the vapid and self-obsessed wives of the slave owners, who like to "*paint their Faces*, and *Puff*, and *powder their Hair*, and to bring up their Sons and Daughters in *Idleness* and *Wantonness*, and in all manner of *Pride* and *Prodigality*, in *decking* and *adorning* their Carkasses with pufft and powdered Hair, with *Ruffles* and *Top-knots*, *Ribbands* and *Lace*, and *gay Cloathing*, and what not." Hepburn betrays a Swiftian distaste for female adornment in this vitriolic passage, and cannot escape accusations of misogyny. The repeated invective against "pufft and powdered Hair," the objectification of women's bodies as "Carkasses," and the rather limp concluding words:

“and what not,” suggest that Hepburn was not entirely in control while writing this. Nevertheless, his characterization of planters’ wives as “*Jezebel-like*” is consistent both with wider Quaker discourses about modesty in dress and appearance, and with a developing stereotype of the planter’s wife or daughter which would become familiar to readers of later abolitionist literature, in works ranging from Anna Letitia Barbauld’s 1791 *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq* (“Lo! where reclin’d, pale Beauty courts the breeze,/Diffus’d on sofas of voluptuous ease”), to Jane Austen’s 1814 depiction of the sofa-diffused Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*.²³

Hepburn’s third characterization is of the enslaved people themselves, and he draws a picture of their condition that powerfully contrasts with his image of the fine clothes of the slaveholders’ wives. Instead, slaves are dressed “in the *vilest Raggs*, much ado to cover their nakedness, and many of them not a *Shirt* upon their Backs, and some them not a *Shoe* upon their Foot.” Hepburn’s observations are made in New Jersey, not the Caribbean. The absence of shoes and adequate clothing means “in *cold Frosts* and *Snow* in the Winter Time, that many of them have their Feet and other members *frozen off*, by reason of their Cruell Usage.” Hepburn is careful here to blame the slave owners and not the weather for this dreadful circumstance, and he compounds his accusations with another series of descriptions of the violent and hypocritical behavior of “Negro-masters.” Among these is the charge that slaveholders treat their slaves worse than they treat their dogs. The force of this accusation is somewhat diminished by its status as proverb, applicable to a range of situations. Hepburn revives the cliché by providing a specific example. “They accomodate their Slaves,” he argues, “which [*sic*] such Names as these, *Toby, Mando, Mungo, Jack, Hector, and Hagar*, and such like Names they give to their *Dogs* and *Horses*.” The renaming of slaves was one way in which Europeans attempted to strip Africans of their identity and to assert their power over them. Africans would later reject the names imposed upon them and reclaim their African identities, as both an act of resistance, and as a statement of independence from the slave system and its legacy. In 1789, for example, Gustavus Vassa published his autobiography under the African name of Olaudah Equiano. Hepburn is one of the first European writers to draw

attention to and critique the power relationships inherent in the system of renaming slaves, but his argument would become an important part of antislavery and antiracist discourse.²⁴

By satirically caricaturing the slaveholder, his wife, and their slaves, Hepburn establishes an image of the slaveholding household as one that is both corrupt and corrupting. This sense of the uniform depravity of the slave system is developed into an argument that shows its complete nonconformity with the Ten Commandments. To do this, Hepburn briefly returns to his description of the brutality of the slaveholders, before questioning the effect servitude must have on both the psychological and the spiritual well-being of enslaved people. Again, Hepburn provides specific examples rather than vague generalizations or theological exegeses, and his primary evidence is the reality of slave suicide. He writes of the enslaved that “some of them when they see themselves surrounded and trepanned with all the Miseries aforesaid, and many more, then they go into Dispair, and miserably *murder themselves*, and som their *Masters*, to get rid of their Tortures and miserable Slavish Life There was one of them (*I think*) within less then two years ago, shot himself whith a Gun, near his Masters House, within a few miles off the place where I write this lamentable story.” Hepburn was not the first writer to draw attention to slaves committing suicide. In 1688, for example, Aphra Behn had depicted the attempted suicide of her eponymous hero Oroonoko. Just two years before Hepburn wrote *American Defence*, Joseph Addison had recounted in *The Spectator* a story of the suicide of two slaves on the British Caribbean island of St. Christopher, now better known as St. Kitts. Whether Hepburn had access to these texts is not certain, but while neither Behn’s nor Addison’s depiction of slave suicide can be said to have been part of any movement against slavery, Hepburn’s account is one of the earliest we have in which an account of a suicide is used as direct evidence of the iniquity of slavery. It would by no means be the last. In reality, slaves suffering from a range of psychological traumas would kill themselves in despair. Others would take their lives as a protest against their servitude. As antislavery discourse evolved throughout the eighteenth century, literary authors focused on and developed the representation of slave suicide into a familiar trope of abolitionist literature, with perhaps the most famous

example being John Bicknell and Thomas Day's eponymous "Dying Negro," the central figure of their influential antislavery poem, written in 1773.²⁵

Hepburn's analysis of suicide centers on the sinfulness of "self-murder," which is a breach of the sixth commandment. Indeed, he concludes, "all the Ten Commands of God" are broken by slaves, not because of their desire to sin, but because the slave system gives them no alternative. In an incantatory passage, Hepburn details how each commandment is broken in turn. The passage is too long to quote in full, but Hepburn's method in showing how slaves are forced to breach commandments five to eight is typical. "Their Children being sold from their Parents," Hepburn argues, "they unavoidably cannot honour them; and here is the breach of the *fifth*. And to get rid of their miserable Tortures, many kill themselves and others; and here is the breach of the *Sixth*. The parting of Man and Wife makes them commit *Adultery* with others; and here is the breach of the *Seventh*. To maintain Self-preservation, they unavoidably must *steal*; and here is the breach of the *Eight*." The structure and rhythm of the passage suggest that it may have been delivered orally before being committed to print. In either case, it is an original approach, since it combines both scriptural analysis (which Quakers had offered before) with practical firsthand knowledge of the conditions of slavery (which by and large they had used only sparingly in their antislavery writing). Hepburn even reproduces a sample of dialogue between a slave and a slaveholder in support of his argument. Whether or not it is genuine, it is certainly a chilling vignette of a sadistic slave driver. Noting that slaves often run away, Hepburn relates that "when they are catcht their Master will ask them, *Do you not deserve to be hung up and Beat?* and here they must bear False witness against themselves (which is worse than against their Neighbours) and say, *yes, I do, deserve to be hung up and Beat*; and here is the breach of the *ninth*." Hepburn concludes with another attack on the Christian credentials of the "Masters," noting that "in their *Baptism*" they engaged "to keep *all Gods holy commands*." That they do not, he wryly observes, "is a poor encouragement for Godfathers indeed."²⁶

The satiric moment punctuates the incantation and opens the way for a change in the tone and argument of the book. It is also another

example of Hepburn's principal innovation. Until this point, antislavery Quakers had not used satire, even fleetingly, although they would do so in the future, as would many other antislavery writers on both sides of the Atlantic. The satiric tone is sustained, since Hepburn's next maneuver (after a short digression into the history of the Early Church) is borrowed from a satirical technique that was growing in popularity in the early eighteenth century, and which may also allude to the Germantown Protest of 1688. Whether or not Hepburn was familiar with the text of the Protest, we do know that he was familiar with the position on slavery taken by the Germantown Quakers, since he tells us so. In the following section, consciously or otherwise he picks up the Germantown Protesters' argument about Turkish slavery, and conflates it with their argument that American slavery was giving America a bad reputation in Europe. Unlike the Germantown Protesters, Hepburn's concern is not the economic one that potential European settlers may be discouraged from emigrating once they hear about slavery, but the spiritual one that Muslims may be discouraged from converting to Christianity. His worry is that if "the Actions of our *American Negro-Masters* should go unto the *Turks* and other *Heathen Nations* [that it might] harden them in *Mahumetanism* and other *Heathenism*, and to imbolden them to blaspheme against Christ and his Gospel."²⁷

Whether or not this is a genuine fear, it leads into a satirical passage employing the convention of the "ingénue narrator" to discuss the evils of American slavery from an external viewpoint. Imagining that "it is not impossible but that an *American Negro Master* and a *Turk* should meet and discourse this Point betwixt them," he offers an irony-laden speech from a Turkish slaveholder giving his views on American slavery. While this approach might have been Hepburn's independent innovation, it is also possible that he was acquainted with Giovanni-Paolo Marana's book *Espion turc* (commenced in 1684), which had been translated into English by William Bradshaw and others (or in later volumes directly written in English) as *Letters writ by a Turkish Spy* between 1687 and 1694. This book, which presented the fictitious correspondence of "Mahmut the Arabian," a visitor to the French court, allowed Marana to satirize French society as if from the viewpoint of one who was new to it. Hepburn takes a similar, if simpler, approach.

His Turk greets the American “Negro Master” and is “well pleased, Brother that you and we agree so well in this Point, *viz.* in making Slaves of them we can have the Mastery over.” This genial greeting is of course an ironic and wounding criticism of the idea that the possession of force automatically legitimizes its use: a doctrine deeply inimical to Quaker principles of nonviolence. How Quakers, or any Christians of the period, might have reacted to being called “Brother” by a Muslim is hard to tell, but the implication here is that the slaveholder is in confraternity with “heathens,” and thus the salutation serves from the start to undermine the slaveholder’s position as a true Christian. The irony in the passage deepens as it progresses. As a true “ingénue narrator,” the Turk asks in an innocent tone, “how comes it to pass, that you find fault with us for making Slaves of Men, when you your selves do the same?” It is left to the reader to discover the hypocrisy, but the satire is clumsier when the Turk supposes that Christian slaveholders are “lukewarm for *Proselytes*” because they do not free their slaves on conversion, in the Turkish manner. The Turk concludes by quoting Christian scripture and invoking the Golden Rule. “I have heard,” he says, “that ye should do to all men as ye would they should do to you. And if this be the Gospel of the blessed Messiah, I will tell you plainly, I look upon you to be apostasized in this Point, and I would advise you either to embrace the rest of our *Mahometan* Practices (and then we would receive you) or otherwise to walk more closely to the Rules and Practice of *Christianity*.” In an era of deep hostility toward, and profound misunderstanding of, the Islamic faith, this was a cutting criticism of the hypocrisy of those who held slaves while professing Christianity. The invitation from the imaginary Turk to embrace Islam implies its opposite: that slaveholders should leave the Christian faith—or emancipate their slaves. The satire is not particularly complex, but it is effective.²⁸

The following passage involves not travel in space but travel in time and it takes the form of a dialogue between a “Negro Master” and a Christian “of after ages to come.” Here, Hepburn’s imagination deserts him. Rather than imagining that in “ages to come,” slavery might be abolished and thus constructing an argument based on a dialogue between a slaveholder and one from a utopian society where slaveholding is unknown, he instead merely imagines that the arguments he makes in

the present will serve equally well in the future. Nevertheless, the dialogue is another form of satire, in which the “Negro Master” repeatedly, and ironically, incriminates himself. Misunderstanding the new deal offered by God in the New Testament, he offers scriptural proof for the legitimacy of slavery from the Old, arguing that: “I think I have Proof enough, that have the *Old Testament*, although I meddle not with the *New*.” It might be argued that this is a hint that the Negro Master is Jewish, but this is unlikely. It is more plausible that he is a representation of a Quaker who is an opportunistic reader of the Christian Bible. He is also an opportunistic reader of church politics. Leaping straight from the Old Testament to “the *Christianity of our Times*,” he asserts that current Church practice justifies slavery. Referring to “the famous *Bishops of England*,” he notes that they send missionaries to America who “do make their Gains by Negro Slaves, and have their Houses crawling *black* with them.” This may well be a swipe at the Anglican Church by a Quaker, but it is fair criticism. Slaves were attached as property to the estates of several colonial parishes and, just four years earlier, the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts had inherited the wealthy Codrington Estate in Barbados with all its slaves. The Church of England would continue to be an institutional slaveholder well into the nineteenth century.²⁹

The Negro Master is on less safe ground, and Hepburn’s satire becomes less subtle, when he asserts that “that famous and zealous sect of *Presbyterians*” and “that pious sect of *Anabaptists*” (neither, we should remember, any great friend to the Quakers) both “Lovingly embrace this Practice in making Slaves of Negroes,” and that “if the Church, and *Presbyterians*, and *Baptists* did but agree so lovingly in other Points as they do in making Slaves of Negroes, I think they might be stiled *One Community*.” The Christian’s answer speaks to the Quaker peace principle. It is “no Wonder,” he replies, that these sects agree on slavery since they all “both by Principle and Practice do *Fight*, and *Kill*, and take away the Lives of many Thousands in Battles, for their inriching of themselves.” Hepburn may well be consciously invoking John Locke’s famous dictum that slavery “is the state of war continued.” If he is, then it is a pointed remark, since Locke argued that only captives taken in a just war could be legally enslaved. Clearly, no war conducted for the purpose

of “enriching of themselves” could be considered just, and while Hepburn is not suggesting that Anglicans and others directly fight wars in Africa to procure slaves, he is asserting a broad equivalence between their willingness to engage in unjust wars and their willingness to deal in slaves. More certainly, his thinking is influenced by other antislavery Quakers, including the Germantown Protesters and the Keithian pamphleteers, who had early on drawn attention to the violence inherent in slave trading, and the fact that many slaves were prisoners of wars conducted solely for the purpose of getting slaves. This is a strong argument, couched in satiric language, but Hepburn is too fair-minded to successfully sustain the satirical mode, and he quickly undercuts himself. Despite a spirited attack on the bloodlust of other sects, his Christian narrator finally concedes that no Christian sect uniformly “agreed in making Slaves of Negroes” and that a Christian of any sect who had not been “either blinded with the love of Gain, or with the plausible Pretences of such as are” would not believe slavery to be lawful. The point may be fair, but the argument is considerably weakened.³⁰

The following four pages of dialogue are weaker still. Hepburn allows his “Negro Master” to ask the inevitable question of why, if the Quakers are “the only *true* and *real Christians*, [that] there is no People more forward to make Slaves of Negroes than they are.” In a sense this is the central question of the book, since Hepburn’s audience is made up of the Quakers whom he hopes will abandon slavery. Instead of careful persuasion, however, Hepburn vents frustration. “This,” he confesses, “is the greatest Wonder, to see a People so conformable to the rest of the Principles and Practices of Christianity, induced by the Example of the looser Sorts of Christians, to embrace an enriching Sin, and sacrifice that command of Christ, to do to others what they would not be done by.” Breaking the Golden Rule is the cardinal sin of slaveholders, as it is elsewhere in Quaker antislavery rhetoric, but the explanation, that they were influenced by other sects, is neither convincing nor persuasive. For several pages after this point, the writing becomes parochial and confused, as both sides in Hepburn’s dialogue talk about the behavior of individual New Jersey Quakers during the recent war against the French in Canada. The Negro Master concludes that, although many Quakers kept to the peace principle in not contributing to the cost of the war,

still “they did not forget their Interest, but did become Negro-Masters” and that this behavior amounts to “a perfect Proof that we may make Slaves of Negroes.” It is difficult to read much complexity into this argument. Both the Christian and the Negro Master do little more than trade names, and the dialogue does not succeed either in offering new arguments against slavery or in instructing the reader in how to fruitfully approach a dialogue with Negro Masters of their acquaintance. Indeed, Hepburn’s concern by the end of the dialogue seems to be less centered on the specific issue of slavery, and more generally alarmed at the worldliness of the American Quakers who “embraced *Magistracy*, which cannot be upheld without the *Carnal Sword*.” Having accepted political power in the colonies, he reasons, it is “no Wonder” that Quakers should also become slaveholders. The desire that Quakers should withdraw from colonial politics seems somewhat nostalgic, but it is not made explicit, which is perhaps just as well since Hepburn must have realized that to push the logic of this argument to its logical extreme would preclude him from entering the public sphere himself.³¹

Hepburn directly addresses his reader in the final four pages. In this passage, he once again makes an original contribution to the anti-slavery debate. Until this point, Quaker antislavery writers had concentrated on asking Friends to buy no more slaves, to treat those slaves which they already held with humanity, and to educate them in the Christian religion. The question of emancipation had been treated with more circumspection. As we saw in Chapter 1, George Fox had in 1676 recommended only that slaves be freed “after a considerable Term of Years.” Likewise, in 1693, the Keithian pamphleteers argued that slaves should be set at liberty only “after some reasonable time of moderate service.” Hepburn’s position is far more radical. Having established that slaveholding is a sin, he turns to the question of how that sin must be expiated and declares that “*I am of Opinion, that such Sins cannot be repented of without Restitution made to them that they have wronged; for until the Cause be removed, I know not how the Effect should cease.*” Much of the ensuing argument centers on the idea that, without restitution being made in the here and now, slaveholders can expect eternal restitution to be made in the hereafter. Nevertheless, Hepburn does argue for immediate emancipation, and suggests that restitution

should go further. He names no price or tariff, and this is far from being a demand that slaves should be offered a specific package of compensation, but this is a far more radical demand—that the economic as well as the human rights of the enslaved be recognized—than anything yet seen in Quaker antislavery discourse.³²

The content of Hepburn's book is thus innovative on several points. Its form is equally innovative. As we have seen, Hepburn was the first Quaker antislavery writer to make use of satire, and the first to frame part of his argument as dialogue. He does so with mixed success, admittedly, and that is also true of his third formal innovation. Although some poets had paid attention to slavery by 1715, and a few had lamented the existence of the institution, until this point no Quakers had published poetry intended to directly challenge slavery. Hepburn does and, although his verse can hardly be included among the great poetic achievements of the eighteenth century, his attempts do occupy a significant place in the history of antislavery verse. Of the two short lyrics, the first, which appears at the end of the preface, is the most successful:

*And now to find the Longitude,
Many a Man hath gone about,
But the Perpetual Motion,
Our Negro Masters have found out.*³³

Following the disastrous wreck of the *Association* and three other warships in 1707, with the loss of 2,000 crew, a reliable technique for determining longitude at sea had become a matter of pressing concern and earnest debate. By 1714, when this verse was written, many inventors and explorers had both literally and figuratively “gone about” the world in search of what still seemed an elusive pipe dream. Indeed, in that same year, the British government offered prizes totaling £45,000 to anyone who could invent a reliable way of determining longitudinal position. Perpetual motion machines were considered implausible by many early modern scientists, although that did not stop would-be inventors from attempting them. Hepburn's satirical verse thus offers the reader the idea of two potential scientific breakthroughs that would

significantly enhance the quality of lives of many, were they to be realized. The irony is that the more difficult of these has already been “found out” by “Negro Masters” and, instead of contributing to the good of mankind, the unceasing labor of the slaves, and the violent coercion needed to produce that ceaseless motion, can only be said to add to the general stock of human misery. It is a tight and effective piece of satire, contrasting proposed or imagined benefits of enlightenment thought with the gothic realities of life on a slave plantation.³⁴

Hepburn’s second poem is little more than doggerel. He uses it to conclude his work, and the poem picks up on the arguments about repentance and restitution that fill his closing pages. The metrication is poor, the rhyming clumsy, and the argument weak. Nevertheless, this verse remains one of the earliest antislavery poems in the English language and for that reason it is reproduced here:

And so, the Negro-Masters may here see,
 Some of their Dangers in Eternitie.
 For there is no Repentance in the Graves
 Of the Wrongs done unto their Negro-Slaves.
 The present time is their Repentant-Day;
 When that is done, I have no more to say.
If they persist in their ungodly Gains,
I'm like to get my Labour for my Pains.
I'll come to a close, hoping they'll amend,
*In giving God the praise; and so I End.*³⁵

Arguments Against Making Slaves of Men

It is “the saying of the Wise Man,” Hepburn asserts at the end of his book, “That *A three-fold Cord is not easily broken.*” In accordance with that principle, he presents two other works on slavery to supplement his own. The final section of this chapter accordingly considers the thirteen-page pamphlet *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men*, which is the second pamphlet in Hepburn’s collection, before briefly discussing the extract from *The Athenian Oracle*, which concludes Hepburn’s antislavery

trilogy. The author of *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men* is unknown, although presumably it was a friend or acquaintance of Hepburn's since we have no record of the work being published elsewhere. David Brion Davis speculates that it was written by William Southeby, although there is no evidence for this. The real author will probably never be known, but the tract is plain enough. It presents twenty arguments against slavery followed by nine objections to the arguments, nineteen "motives," and four practical propositions. These fifty-two short sections, plus two unnumbered paragraphs, together reiterate much of what Hepburn had said, as well as much of what had been written by Fox and others over the past fifty years, but they do make original arguments too, and present the first genuinely practical suggestions for an end to slavery in the British colonies.³⁶

In an unlikely pairing, the primary influences on the first section of *The Arguments* (the "arguments" themselves) seem to have been Aristotle and King David, since each of the twenty arguments is a syllogism, and each syllogism has a similar conclusion, which is always a variation on the phrase "therefore the making slaves of Negroes is unlawful." As we can see from Arguments 1 and 2, the two shortest arguments, the combined effect of the repeated refrain is reminiscent of much religious poetry, and, in particular, the rhythm and cadence of the section invokes the book of Psalms in the form into which it had been translated into English at the start of the seventeenth century:

Arg. 2. *Violence* is (in ordinary Cases) unlawful, But making *Slaves of Men* (against their will) is *Violence*.

Therefore making *Slaves of Men*, is unlawful.

Arg. 3. Punishing Men *without Respect to any Evil they have done*, is unlawful.

But making *Slaves of Negroes*, Is punishing *Men* without Respect to any Evil they have done, Therefore the Making *Slaves of Negroes* is unlawful.³⁷

The arguments are not original—they had been articulated by the Keithian pamphleteers, for example—but they are here phrased in a particularly concentrated form. The effect, repeated twenty times, is

somewhat hypnotic and suggests that *Arguments* may originally have been intended for oral delivery. The text was probably also written as a promptbook for such antislavery activists as might be found, supplying simple propositions and answers for them to use in the field or the meeting house. Such texts did become popular in later phases of the abolition debate. James Ramsay, for example, produced a pamphlet called *Objections to the abolition of the slave trade, with answers*, at the height of the first British abolitionist movement in 1788. *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men* appears to be the first publication of this sort. As such, it is remarkably successful, and an activist who committed all the arguments and propositions to heart would be well equipped to engage in debate.³⁸

Curiously, for a book presumably written by a Quaker, observance of the Golden Rule as an argument against slavery is not asserted until almost halfway through the pamphlet—it is argument eighteen, of twenty—and the earlier arguments are notable for their emphasis on legal and economic rather than spiritual objections to slavery. Although these arguments are undeniably based on Christian principles, they are rooted in English common law values such as that labor must be remunerated fairly and that crimes may be punished only after due process of law. We are thus reminded in the opening argument that “the *using Mens labour, and not paying them the Value of it (except the Labourer gives it)* is unjust and therefore unlawful.” As the arguments progress they become more concerned with spiritual equity, and the final argument echoes what both Hepburn and the Germantown Protesters had argued before: that slavery “brings a Reproach upon our holy Religion.” Nevertheless, despite restating much of what had been said before, with their emphasis on temporal rather than spiritual concerns the arguments mark a subtle shift in Quaker antislavery rhetoric and position it more strategically for convincing members of faiths other than the Society of Friends.³⁹

Nine possible objections to the arguments follow, and several of these previously had not been either articulated or challenged in Quaker antislavery writing. These include the ideas that “*Negroes are more happy when Slaves than free*,” that “*it is better for a Captive to be made a Slave than to be Murdered*,” that “*Some Men could not get their Living, if it were*

not for their Negro-Slaves,” and that “*Canaan was to be a* Servant of Servants.” The responses are clear and brief: white people are not happier as slaves, slaves were often made captives only in order to be sold into slavery, “Poverty does not make Robbery lawful,” and it was not said of Canaan that “it should be so to the End of the World.” That these are cogently expressed and carefully enumerated is significant in itself, as it demonstrates that Quaker antislavery discourse is becoming better theorized in this period and thus moving toward a more mature phase of its development. That some plainly expressed objections to antislavery thought had indeed been articulated, and thus required countering, is even more significant. Few people choose to expend intellectual energy justifying a practice that is seen as natural, inevitable, and divinely sanctioned. *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men* provides evidence that, by 1715, slave owners and slave traders were finding it necessary to defend their actions against accusations that they were cruel and unjust. A debate was plainly under way, and the discourses concerning slavery, serving the needs and interests of all sides in the debates, were growing more complex as a result.⁴⁰

Much of the rest of *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men* is taken up with further scriptural evidence against slavery, again phrased in pithy aphorism, but adding little to what had already been said. One short passage, containing four proposals, is different in that it offers specific ideas for ending slavery in the American colonies. Among these, the most radical is a program of repatriation, seemingly to be funded by the slaveholders themselves:

Proposal. 1. That *Subscriptions* be taken of all Masters that will set their Negroes free, and of the Number of Negroes so to be set free, that they may be sent to their own country.

Prop. 2. That subscriptions be taken, what each Man (Negro Master, or others) will give the defray the Charge of sending the Negroes home.

Prop. 3. That such Negroes as had rather serve their Masters, then go home, may be kept still (it being their *Free Act*, and it is not being safe to have them free in this Country).

Prop. 4. That the uttermost Pains be taken to instruct them in the Principles of Christian Religion, that (if by the Grace of God they may be *Savingly* converted) they may be instrumental to convert their Country-Men at home.⁴¹

These proposals, although the most radical part of the text, and although one of the most radical statements of practical antislavery to have been made by Quakers to this date, are nevertheless innocent of the political and economic realities of the slavery system. They also betray a deep-seated fear of African people that, despite the antislavery credentials of many Friends, almost certainly represents Quakers' daily attitudes toward slaves more accurately than the broad assertions of common humanity that fill the pages of their antislavery writings. The author accepts as axiomatic that it is not "safe" for freed slaves to remain in the country, and while he (or she) does not explain why it is not safe, we need only look at the legislation passed at this time by the Pennsylvania Assembly to see that Quakers shared with other colonists a fear of uprising as well as a fear of miscegenation, both of which were articulated and encoded in the laws that were examined earlier in this chapter. Quakers may have been in the process of coming out against slavery, but they were developing arguments against neither simple prejudice nor the more theorized pseudoscientific racisms that, although perhaps more a feature of the late eighteenth century, were in the early stages of articulation in Hepburn's day. In either case, it is hard to see how any of these proposals could be put into effect without sanction of law, and, even then, it is naive to think, as the author seems to, that slaveholders might be prepared to, or even compelled to, "defray the Charge of sending the Negros home." Radical though they might be, these proposals are both too vague and too idealistic to carry much weight, and their effect is thus bathetic.

Finally, we might briefly consider the extract from *The Athenian Oracle*, a 1704 reprint of the highlights of John Dunton's *Athenian Gazette*, or *Athenian Mercury* as it was also called. This miscellaneous London journal ran from 1691 to 1697 and answered readers' queries on any subject. Often cited as the first advice column, or the forerunner to *Notes and Queries*, the questions and answers were extremely various and ranged from serious political and theological matters to personal issues

that sometimes verged on the salacious or scatological. Dunton himself was a famous eccentric. Born in Huntingdonshire in 1659, he became a writer, bookseller, and ardent Whig. In 1686 he visited Massachusetts, where he came into contact with notable Puritans and must have witnessed slavery firsthand. Returning to England, in 1691 he founded the Athenian Society, which, in the view of his biographer Stephen Parks, existed solely to disguise the fact that a bookseller rather than a learned society was behind the “question project,” as the *Mercury* was also known. In 1691, a reader asked if it was “Lawful to trade with Negroes, and to Buy ’em of one another.” Dunton answered that “It’s undoubtedly Lawful to Deal and Traffick with ’em; for how should we else convert ’em?” For some reason, when the reprint appeared thirteen years later, Dunton had changed his mind. To the question “Whether Trading for Negros, i.e. carrying them out of their own Country into perpetual Slavery, be in it self Unlawful, and especially contrary to the great Law of Christianity?” Dunton answered, “Sir, After a mature and serious consideration of the Question proposed, I am for the Affirmative, and cannot see how such a Trade (tho’ much used by Christians) can be any way justify’d, and fairly reconciled to the Christian Law.” Although a decade earlier he had merely asserted that the slave trade was legal, on this occasion Dunton’s reasoning was founded on evidence: the slave trade was against the law of Christianity because it violated the Golden Rule, it was man-stealing, it undermined attempts to convert Africans to Christianity, it was receiving stolen goods, it was the cause of wars in Africa, and it was explicitly forbidden in scripture. Dunton’s argument mirrors very closely the Germantown Protest of 1688, but it seems unlikely indeed that he had access to that document. Even if he had, it is doubtful that he would have wanted to promote Quakerism. In 1692, he published some derogatory remarks about Quakers that incensed many London Friends, including no less a person than William Penn, who issued “a series of tracts” in defense of the Quakers. It seems more likely that Dunton, a notably original thinker, reached the same conclusions as Pennsylvania Quakers from first principles, rather than from imitation, and did so after a genuine period of “mature and serious consideration.” Either way, Dunton’s arguments supported Hepburn’s. Hepburn included the *Athenian Oracle* article either not knowing, or

not caring, that Dunton was no friend to the Quakers and that he had originally held very different views.⁴²

Dunton's 1704 article reminds us that Quakers did not have a monopoly on antislavery writing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but Hepburn's appropriation of the article also shows that some Quakers were searching for wider legitimacy for their antislavery stance. In any case, by 1719, when the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting codified its warnings against keeping slaves in the Book of Discipline, Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey had clearly been exposed to a good deal of debate on the slavery question. As the arguments put forward by John Hepburn and the presumably Quaker author of *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men* testify, Quaker antislavery discourse in the region was becoming more systematized and more theoretically complex. The rhetoric seems also to have been spreading to Quaker communities beyond the Pennsylvania–New Jersey region. In part this may have been an effect of the London Yearly Meeting coming to a view on the question in 1713, and in part this was because Delaware Valley Friends, despite their protestations to the contrary in their letters to London in 1712 and 1714, did in fact both correspond and maintain personal and economic relationships with the other colonies. By the end of the second decade of the eighteenth century, therefore, we can speak with confidence of a set of repeated statements about slavery that were shared by many Quakers around the world. While it is difficult to establish how far Hepburn's publication circulated, it is clear that varieties of antislavery discourse were becoming an increasingly vital component of Quaker discussion across the colonies and beyond in this period.

That this is the case is borne out by records of debate and dissension on the slavery question in Quaker communities beyond Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Discussion of slavery took place in New York and Rhode Island between 1715 and 1720, and we have already seen that the question was considered by the London Yearly Meeting in 1713. Analysis of the texts resulting from this debate is hampered by the unfortunate fact that most of them are no longer extant and, in most cases, were censored (and sometimes censured) by Quaker leaders before they could become public. Even in Pennsylvania, William Southeby's attempt to publish antislavery tracts in 1716 met with hostility from the

Philadelphia Monthly Meeting. Further afield, John Farmer, a Quaker from Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, took the slavery question to the Meeting of Newport, Rhode Island, in 1717. Since Rhode Island was at the center of the American slave trade, it is perhaps no surprise that he was censured and his pamphlet prevented from being published. Nevertheless, no doubt in part due to his influence, the New England Yearly Meeting did register in that year “A Weighty concern being on this meeting concerning the Importing and keeping Slaves,” and asked that “Merchants do write their Correspondents in the Islands and elsewhere to discourage their sending any more in order to be sold by any friends here.” The following year, the New York Quakers Horsman Mullenix and William Burling agitated against slavery. Burling went so far as to write a pamphlet. It was suppressed at the time but survived, whether in its original form or not we cannot know, and was printed by Benjamin Lay twenty years later in 1738.⁴³

Clearly, there was considerable divergence of views between both individual Quakers, and between Quaker communities in different parts of the world by 1720. The leadership of no substantial Quaker meeting was prepared both to advise against slaveholding or slave trading and to give their advice the power of sanction. But that is not to say that debate among Friends of the period had “little impact” or that few advances were made. Laws and regulations, of sects and societies as well as of nations and colonies, often lag behind popular sentiment. While radical governments have been formed throughout human history, the norm is that leaders and legislatures tend more often to be conservative than radical. Political change is usually dependent on the formation of discursive structures that allow change first to be imagined, next to be advocated, and finally to be enacted. By 1720, there can be little doubt that Quakers across many of the American colonies, and to some extent across the world, were aware of the debate taking place in Pennsylvania. An end to slave trading, or even to slavery itself, had been both imagined and advocated, and that debate was leaking out beyond the Delaware Valley to inform the conversations of all Friends who came into contact with slaves. Quaker leaders were not yet ready to embrace antislavery ideals, but a public discourse of antislavery had become a real presence throughout the global Quaker community.

CHAPTER FOUR

“O unrighteous gain!”

FROM RHETORIC TO RITUAL, 1727–43

BY 1720, A PUBLIC DISCOURSE of antislavery, as well as a submerged counter discourse, had been articulated in an increasingly sophisticated manner by Friends first in Barbados and later in Pennsylvania. It must have been clear to most Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the 1720s, therefore, that slavery was not an unquestionable fact of nature but instead an artificial system that could be challenged and which had been challenged. This chapter explores both the discursive processes and, to a certain extent, the political processes by which Friends in the Delaware Valley moved from the messy compromise of 1716–19 to an even less stable compromise in 1743 in which antislavery was enshrined in Quaker ritual but without the power of positive sanction. The central part of this chapter, however, consists of critical readings of two important antislavery texts of the 1720s and '30s: Ralph Sandiford's *A brief examination of the practise of the times* (1729) and Benjamin Lay's *All slave-keepers, that keep the innocent in bondage, apostates* (1737). Both of these books are more often referred to than actually read, and both are often represented as lying out of the mainstream of Quaker antislavery thought. This chapter argues that, despite their authors' seeming eccentricities, both texts clearly emerge from an increasingly sophisticated discourse of antislavery that was being articulated in private homes as well as in meeting houses, and which had become a mainstream Quaker concern by the start of the 1740s.

The Question Posed Once More: 1727-30

How far the slavery question was debated informally among Friends between 1720 and 1727 is difficult to tell, since few records of informal conversations survive. If Quakers were talking among themselves about slavery, however, their conversations certainly remained private, since the matter does not arise in minutes of Quaker meetings for several years. Indeed, there is little to suggest that Pennsylvanian Friends in the 1720s had any relish to formally reopen a debate that had been so divisive in such recent memory. Nevertheless, there are indications that the advice of 1716 to refrain from trading in slaves had been taken seriously in the colony's meeting houses because, in 1728, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting notes in its Epistle to London that "no Friends that we know of within the Extent of the Meeting, are concern'd in that practice." This was either naive or disingenuous since several prominent Friends continued to buy slaves at this time even though, as Jean Soderlund has shown, both slave trading and slaveholding were, in general, declining among the Delaware Valley Friends. Although economic and social factors unrelated to the development of a discourse of antislavery may also have played their part, many Pennsylvanian Quakers appear to have been heeding the Yearly Meeting's advice to avoid trading in or owning slaves. One must therefore conclude that, far from having "little impact," the Quaker antislavery debates, and the texts that reflected them, had made an appreciable difference to the way that most Quakers thought about the slave trade, and to the ways in which they participated in the trade.¹

The direct impetus for the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 1728 assertion that few Friends were involved in slave trading came from the London Yearly Meeting. In 1727, London had again debated the slave trade, and had recovered and restated the advice which they had sent to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1713. The short minute of London's discussion is as follows:

The Answer given by y^c Correspond^{ts} here to ffrriends of Pensilvania and y^c Jarseys y^c 12th 6 mo 1713, by y^c order of y^c yearly meet^g and their Answer to y^c friends of Pensilvania on y^c 3rd 8 mo 1715, both confirming y^c Sense of this meeting

That y^e Importing negroes from their native Country & Relations by ffriends is not a Commendable nor allowed practice which Answers and Sense is approved and that practice censured by this meeting, and that this minute is ordered to be sent by [Benj^a Boaling] to friends in y^e Plantations abroad, as well as to y^e Several Quarterly meetings at home.²

It is not entirely clear why London chose to discuss slavery in 1727, but the impetus may have come from the Pennsylvania Assembly themselves, who had the previous year revised the colony's slave code and once again attempted to increase the duty on imported slaves. "An Act for Laying a Duty in Negroes Imported into this Province," passed 5 March 1726, imposed a duty of £5 on each slave landed in Pennsylvania, but appears not to have become law. "An Act for the Better Regulating of Negroes in this Province," passed the same day, did eventually become law and gives us a very clear sense of how the colonists really viewed Africans; the act argued, "'tis found by experience that free negroes are an idle, slothful people and often prove burdensome to the neighborhood and afford ill examples to other negroes." For that reason, the act required anyone emancipating a slave to deposit £30 at the county court "to secure and indemnify the city, township or county where he resides from any charge or incumbrance." Far from encouraging colonists, whether Friends or not, to emancipate slaves, this act placed a very serious economic obstacle in the path of any slaveholder who wanted to free his slaves. Whether this legislation passed by the Pennsylvania Assembly was the impetus behind London's renewed interest in the slave trade is impossible to tell. It may instead have been that the London Yearly Meeting was aware that its earlier advice was not being heeded and acted merely to reassert its authority. It may even have been an outbreak of genuine humanitarian spirit. In either case, it is noteworthy that the first Quaker yearly meeting to positively censure the trade was metropolitan, not colonial. Free from the economic concerns that led some colonial Quakers to buy slaves, and untroubled by the possibility that their immediate community might be divided by the ruling, the London Yearly Meeting was able to state unequivocally that

the practice was censured, and, crucially, they decided to back up this advice with action, asking that a copy of the minute be distributed to Quaker communities throughout the world.³

Although this was indeed an important breakthrough, it is nonetheless revealing that the London Yearly Meeting did not in the end advertise their decision as widely as they might have done. The 1727 edition of the general printed Epistle, which was sent out annually to all Quaker communities, contains no reference to the slave trade. The issue is raised only in handwritten epistles to a few specific Quaker communities and, even then, only in a separate copy of the 1727 Yearly Meeting minute included with the original letter and mentioned in postscripts to the Yearly Meeting's copy. For example, London's copy of the epistle to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has a note reading: "The Minute about Importing Negroes sent in the Fair Copy." Similar notes were enclosed with the epistles to Rhode Island and Long Island, both colonies where Friends were wrestling with the problem of slavery. There is no record that the minute was brought to the attention of Friends in colonies such as Jamaica, Virginia, Maryland, or Barbados, since the epistles to those colonies, each more heavily involved in slave trading and slaveholding, do not contain such notes. The decision to alert Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania to the minute on the slave trade, while at the same time keeping Barbados and others in the dark, might seem an act of moral cowardice. On the other hand, assuming that the advice reflected genuine disquiet about slavery and was not merely an attempt to reassert the Meeting's authority, antislavery Friends in London may well have been guided by the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-8). Recognizing that there was little point in sowing antislavery principles in the "stony places" of Virginia and Barbados, they may have chosen instead to let the seed fall in the "good ground" of the middle colonies, which, though silent on the matter at that time, had in the past voiced antislavery sentiment. It seems likely that London chose only to advertise the results of those deliberations in colonies where there was some hope that their thoughts might be taken seriously. If that was the intention it worked, since the debate was promptly reopened at Quaker meetings in Pennsylvania and, a little later, in New England.⁴

Ralph Sandiford's *Brief Examination*

Seemingly encouraged by the London Yearly Meeting's censure of the slave trade, on the first day of the 11th month, 1728/9 (1 February 1729), Ralph Sandiford, a Quaker shopkeeper who lived in the heart of Philadelphia and whose shop overlooked the marketplace where slaves were bought and sold, published a substantial antislavery tract called *A brief examination of the practise of the times*. The book, which Sandiford gave away for free, was later revealed to have been printed by a youthful Benjamin Franklin. It is a jeremiad, or political sermon, which emphasizes the sinfulness of slaveholding and slave trading in the fulminating language of religious enthusiasm. Neither Sandiford nor his friend Benjamin Lay, whose book was published eight years later, "betrayed the slightest awareness of living in the Age of Enlightenment," argues David Brion Davis, while both of their works "drip with the blood and smell of the smoke and ash of hell." Much of the language of both books bears out Davis's assertion, while their emphasis on the theology of the slavery question, combined with the authors' almost solipsistic consciousness of their own sinfulness, at first sight make the books appear divorced from the social and economic realities of the colony in which they were written. Despite this initial reaction, however, neither book can be seen as anything other than a product of the increasingly sophisticated Quaker discourse about slavery that had been emerging in the colony over the past half century. It is also unfair to say, as many have, that neither text had any impact or that both went largely unread. We will return to Benjamin Lay later in this chapter. Here, we should note that Ralph Sandiford's work plainly emerges from a growing body of Quaker antislavery writing to which it both consciously refers and unconsciously alludes. More significantly, it is not merely a work of Christian enthusiasm directed toward the faithful, but also a strategic intervention in the political debate which it aims to further. Its rhetoric, while certainly thundering forth from the pulpit, thus also betrays moments of conciliation and even of political shrewdness.⁵

Sandiford's desire to position the book as a serious intervention in a public political debate is signaled in the opening pages by a lengthy dedication to "my Esteemed Friend Matthew Hughes, Esq; One of the

Representatives for the County of BUCKS." If his intention was to impress the reader with evidence of his access to the power brokers of the Pennsylvania Assembly, then he probably failed. Hughes, according to Carolyn M. Peters, "served 13 undistinguished terms in the Assembly," where he was "remarkably inactive." Neither is there any evidence that Hughes either supported or opposed moves to limit slave trading in the colony. Nevertheless, he may have been the best that the small shopkeeper Sandiford could manage in the way of patronage and, while the attempt seems somewhat ineffectual, we should note that Sandiford addresses his pamphlet to Hughes in his capacity as a secular legislator, and not in his role as a prominent member of the Society of Friends. The book may be grounded in religious thought, but Sandiford was enough of a man of the Enlightenment to recognize that immediate social evils could be remedied only by the duly-elected officers of state. Accordingly, the six-page dedication, while not free from religious sentiment, is more firmly grounded in political and economic realities than most of the ensuing text.⁶

The dedication's opening passages, however, are anything but firmly grounded. Sandiford recounts a terrifying voyage by sea in which he was "robbed by the Pirates," placed in a sloop which "after many violent storms, sprung a Leak, and in 18 Hours sunk before our Eyes." After a time adrift in an "open boat" he came to land and "lay marooned some Months" in the Bahamas, before finally being rescued, at which point "Providence bought us to South-Carolina." Unlike many Quaker writings, on slavery and on other topics, which begin with the internal promptings of the inward light, Sandiford's narrative thus commences with external experience in the Atlantic world. The choice of events also fulfills a symbolic function, since Sandiford's sea of troubles represents the spiritual turmoil he must pass through to reach a moment of insight. In South Carolina, the hardships he previously underwent seem amply compensated for by the generosity of Providence in providing Sandiford with a position with a merchant who is "esteemed the richest in the Province." But it is all a test. This wealthy man "would have bestowed his Bounty on me, but there was that righteous Seed in me, which begs not its Bread, neither would suffer in me to receive more than my Hire, his Riches being the Product of *Negro* and *Indian* slaves, which have

made me a Debtor and an Oppressor in the Creation." If Sandiford's trials at sea were a test of his faith, his unexpected bounty on land was even more so. Resisting the easy temptations of slave-produced wealth, he is able to reconnect with God and "thankfully to acknowledge his Goodness and Mercies, in that he has again restored me to Fulness and Plenty." It is not made clear whether that "plenty" is spiritual, material, or both. What is made clear is that Sandiford viewed his experiences at sea as a spiritual journey, bringing him to equilibrium with his God, and instilling in him a certain knowledge of the iniquity of slavery. There is no reason to doubt that Sandiford indeed experienced hardship at sea, or that he recoiled against slavery as he saw it practiced in South Carolina. Nevertheless, his opening statements in this book are well within an established subgenre of the voyage narrative, in which dangers at sea are seen as spiritual tests. His account of being marooned even places his text in the, at that time, new "tradition" of the Robinsonade. Although it was not formally published in America until 1774, a great number of copies, abridgements, and imitations of *Robinson Crusoe* circulated throughout the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century. We cannot know whether Sandiford had read any of them but it seems likely, not least because he paraphrases part of Defoe's satirical poem *The Reformation of Manners* (1702) in the prefatory material to the second edition of his book. Clearly, Sandiford was a Defoe reader who was as much in touch with recent European literature as he was in tune with the need to influence the colony's legislature.⁷

The remainder of the "Dedication" continues to emphasize secular rather than spiritual arguments against slavery. America, Sandiford argues, is prosperous enough that there is no need to "go to Africa for Bread," and that placing "the Burden which appertains to our Bodily Support" on that continent is neither "Living by the Gospel, or Maintaining Liberty and Property." To such Enlightenment principles as liberty and property, he adds a solid understanding of the processes of the African slave trade, noting that Britain's original investment in trade with Africa had by now been recouped in the most unmerciful way, and that the nation's continuing involvement in the trade was the cause of both civil and domestic turmoil in Africa. Sandiford's analysis of the cause and effects of the slave trade, while not openly republican,

nevertheless lays the blame at the door of the Stuart monarchy. The trade, he argues, is:

The Fruit of a corrupt Tree, which was first planted in K. *Charles's* Time, when the *African* Company was Commissionated for that Trade, which no doubt was chargeable in Shipping, and Forces to build Forts; yet Covetousness, the Motive to it, and Root of all Evil, soon paid it self without Mercy, that to dispatch their Vessels, they would present a *Negro* King with a Sword, or such a Matter, that he may War with his Neighbours, and which ever Party conquers, the Fort is their Market; which proves a Temptation to these poor Creatures, privately to Murder the strongest Part of their Neighbouring Families, that they may sell the Rest, tho' for the least Bawbles; and sometimes the Betrayers and Murderers they take also, and secure them with the Rest in the Vessel, lest surprized with their Captivity, they should drown themselves. O unrighteous Gain!⁸

The passage contains in a highly compressed form many of the most cogent arguments against the slave trade: that it stems from mistaken principles of foreign trade, that it is the cause of war in Africa, that it disrupts social and domestic relationships, and that it drives slaves to suicide. While certainly not inconsistent with Quaker religious principles, these are secular arguments rooted in Sandiford's understanding of the reality of the African experience. To drive home the point, Sandiford concludes his dedication by appealing to Hughes "as a living Member in the Body which you Represent," and emphasizing that the "ensuing Treatise" is "intended for the Good of both Church and State." While much of the "ensuing Treatise" does indeed "drip with the blood and smell of the smoke and ash of hell," it is nonetheless plain that Sandiford's purpose is just as firmly located in the here and now.

That said, the first four pages of Sandiford's seven-page preface do not mention slavery at all. The preface operates as an invocation, calling first on God's authority and then on the authority of George Fox who, Sandiford notes, preached on the subject to Friends in Barbados and

“advised them to use [the slaves] well, and to bring them up in the Fear and Knowledge of God, and after a reasonable Service to set them free.” Although, as we have seen, the writings of earlier antislavery Friends echoed Fox at times, and John Hepburn mentioned Fox’s antislavery writing in the preface to his book, this is the first time that a Quaker antislavery writer provides a substantial quotation from Fox. While this suggests that Fox’s views on slavery are better known by 1729, it also demonstrates Sandiford’s connectedness with the major movements of Quaker antislavery thought, and this is borne out in the main body of his book, which is divided into nineteen sections, each one addressing the problem of slavery from a separate angle. It would be tedious to read each of these arguments closely in turn, particularly since while some of Sandiford’s objections to slavery occupy only a paragraph or two, others run for several pages of densely argued scriptural analysis. Nevertheless, some consistent features do emerge. The first three arguments, for example, scarcely mention slavery, but do make the point that, since we must give an account of ourselves in the hereafter, so therefore we must “consider that Principle and Foundation on which this Practice stands.” In other words, we must bear in mind that the way we treat people in life will form the basis for the way we are judged after death. Although Sandiford does not employ any of the traditional or biblical formulations of the Golden Rule, either here or elsewhere in his book, this is nonetheless an application of the rule and, coming as it does in the book’s opening passages, positions Sandiford in the mainstream of Quaker antislavery thought.⁹

The book’s opening passages echo *Paradise Lost* almost as much as they do the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, providing more evidence that Sandiford was a highly literate follower of nonconformist authors, but it is not until the fourth argument that Sandiford reaches what, to a more secular reader, might be considered the substance of the debate. Here, he attacks the notion that Africans are cursed eternally to be slaves: “neither can these Negroes,” he argues, “be proved, by any Genealogy, the Seed of *Ham*.” Even if they are, he points out, Noah’s curse on Ham’s son Canaan, which “is thought a suitable original for the Negro Trade . . . is not so extensive, as you would have it.” This mildly ironic tone emerges at discrete moments throughout Sandiford’s work.

It marks a significant difference in tone from Fox's work, whose arguments in *Gospel family-order* on the alleged scriptural authority for both slavery and racial difference Sandiford echoes throughout *Brief examination*. Sandiford's ironic sense of humor might be subtle, but it is nevertheless effective. In his analysis of Genesis 9:25, for example, in which Noah had issued the Hamitic curse by crying out, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren," Sandiford notes that in any case the Canaanites "were destroyed: So that their Race is ended, as well as that Dispensation." This historicist interpretation of the biblical text is followed up by some perceptive close reading. Sandiford concludes his discussion of the Hamitic curse with a rhetorical question, asking slaveholders to consider "if these Negroes are Slaves of Slaves, according to the Curse; Whose Slaves then must their Masters be?" By foregrounding the absurdity of using the Hamitic curse to justify modern chattel slavery, Sandiford is using the literary skills of the satirist as well as of the polemicist, and in this his style perhaps owes something to John Hepburn, whose work he may well have read.¹⁰

Not all of the book is so cogently argued. Sandiford often has difficulty sticking to the point, although this perception would depend on whether one is reading his work primarily for secular or for spiritual edification. In Argument 6, for example, Sandiford opens with a Whiggish concern for the idea of liberty, asking, "what greater Unjustice can be Acted, than to Rob a Man of his Liberty, which is more Valuable than Life." Whether this large claim is actually true remains untested here, but it is significant that the assertion is rooted in Enlightenment principles rather than in Christian theology. It is likewise noteworthy that this assertion is stated with clarity and economy, which contrasts strongly with the following two pages. The rest of Argument 6 consists of the lamentation and fulmination characteristic of the jeremiad, in which Sandiford follows his description of alienated liberty by exclaiming, "Oh! hard Lot! Oh! Eternal sinking in Iniquity," and concludes by exhorting the slaveholders to "deceive not thy own Soul, for according to thy Sowing so shall thy Reaping be; if to the Flesh, Corruption, but if to the Spirit, Everlasting Life." The question of liberty, spiritual or otherwise, seems forgotten. Although deeply immersed in both Enlightenment thought and Quaker tradition,

Sandiford nevertheless often lets his enthusiasm override his ability to sustain a coherent argument. For the reader in search of an emotion-centered religious experience, however, this may not necessarily have been a drawback. Sandiford's rhetoric may well have been deeply satisfying to those readers brought up on a diet of moral admonition and political jeremiad, and the modern reader should be aware that in both its social and historical context, the book may have been seen by many as more nearly approaching to the central arguments of the slavery debate than those that focused exclusively on economic or humanitarian principles. While the pattern of a clear and concise secular thesis being followed by a lengthy piece of spiritual rhetoric is repeated at several points throughout the work, this pattern may not have been the most appropriate rhetorical strategy to convince all Quakers. Accordingly, most of Sandiford's arguments are concerned only with biblical exegesis.¹¹

Sandiford adds little to what others had said before him in these discussions. With Fox, he asserts the spiritual equality of Africans, cites the biblical authority enjoining hospitality to strangers, and recommends that slaves "have Food and Rest, and what else is convenient for them." With the Germantown Protesters, he points to the illegality of man-stealing. With both the Germantown Protestors and John Hepburn, he is concerned that their participation in the slave trade gives Quakers in Pennsylvania a poor reputation elsewhere and feels that slavery is "the most arbitrary and Tyrannical Oppression that Hell has invented on this Globe [and] would better become the Religion of *Mahomet*." Hepburn's thoughts on the necessity of restitution are also echoed by Sandiford, although Sandiford cites Fox, not Hepburn, as his inspiration. In sum, what Sandiford has produced is an amalgam of the previous half-century's writing on slavery, embedded within a particularly dense piece of religious rhetoric.¹²

It does not follow, however, that Sandiford's work had no impact merely because it was not particularly original. Indeed, some historians agree that the book did have its influence. Drake notes that the book "reopened the slavery controversy in Philadelphia," while Soderlund argues that Sandiford "broke open the controversy once again." As we have seen, it was in fact London who renewed the controversy—a point

which Sandiford himself notes early on in the second edition of his book, which appeared in 1730—but there can be no doubt that Sandiford's publication intensified a debate prompted by London's relatively mild words of censure. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's complacent reassurance to London that "no Friends that we know of within the Extent of the Meeting, are concern'd in that practice" so clearly masked the truth that slaves were being bought and sold in the city with the Quakers' knowledge and, to some extent, with their blessing, that Sandiford knew his book would meet with a hostile reception from certain sections of the community. Accordingly, he decided to issue it without the permission of the Overseers of the Press, and to make a preemptive appeal to a higher authority. In the opening paragraph of a postscript addressed "To My Select Friends," he explains, "If any are offended with me, or the foregoing Treatise, because it came not forth with the Concurrence of the Meeting, it is in my Heart to desire your Freedom with me therein, that all Offences may be removed according to the Ability the Lord gives me." At some point over the following year, Sandiford did in fact submit the book to the Overseers of the Press. The letter to "Select Friends" in the second edition of the book begins with a revised statement in which Sandiford further explains, "if any are offended with me, or the foregoing Treatise, because it came not forth with the Concurrence of the Meeting, unto whom I would have offered it, but it was repulsed by the Overseers; which if this does not satisfy you, it is in my Heart to desire your farther Freedom with me herein, that all Offences may be removed according to the Ability the Lord gives me."¹³

Why Sandiford thought that the overseers would look kindly on such a controversial book after he had already snubbed them by publishing it without their permission remains a mystery. Nevertheless, the spat did not prevent others from bringing the antislavery message to the Yearly Meeting. In particular, Chester Quarterly Meeting was again keen to take the antislavery message forward. Whether they were inspired by London's minute of 1727, by Sandiford's book, or by both, is difficult to say. What we can be certain of is that their representatives at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for 1729 publicly voiced their concern over the importing and buying of slaves. In their report, they argued

that “finding by our Discipline that we as a Society of People are restricted from being concern’d therein think it as reasonable, that we should be restricted from buying them when imported and in Order thereto desires that this Meeting would take the same unto your serious Consideration.” As with the previous records of discussion at Quaker meetings that we have seen, the clerk’s terse report leaves much to the imagination. “After some Debate Thereupon,” he wrote, “it is without Opposition agreed that the same be referr’d to the Respective Quarterly Meetings.” Although terse, this minute is suggestive. Quaker minutes rarely report that a debate took place at all, so the fact that one is mentioned suggests that it was noteworthy either for its length or for its heat. Likewise, the minutes seldom feel it necessary to assert that a meeting had reached a unanimous decision, usually saying no more than that “the sense of this meeting” had been arrived at. That the Yearly Meeting’s unanimity is emphasized somewhat implies the reverse: that the debate was heated, and that the decision to defer judgment for another year was a compromise made in the face of considerable disagreement. Nevertheless, this was something of a triumph both for Sandiford and for the Chester Quarterly Meeting. Although clearly facing considerable opposition from vested interests within the community, and, in Sandiford’s case, although publishing antislavery opinions in an aggressively unorthodox way likely to inflame tensions, they had nonetheless managed to make discussion of slavery a central item on the agenda for the following year’s Meeting.¹⁴

Ralph Sandiford’s *Mystery of Iniquity*

In the intervening year, Sandiford issued a second edition of his book with the revised title *The Mystery of Iniquity; in a brief examination of the Practice of the Times*. The exact date on which this was published is not known, but it is easy to guess that it was issued in part to meet demand from members of quarterly meetings seeking to examine the arguments from all angles, and in part to advance new arguments in the debate that, at the request of the Yearly Meeting, was now officially taking place in all Quaker communities throughout Pennsylvania and southern

New Jersey. The book, which in view of the current controversies probably circulated far more widely than the first edition, did indeed stir up what according to Benjamin Lay was a vitriolic attack upon its author. Writing a few years after Sandiford's death in 1733, Lay satirically mimics and exaggerates the voice of the slaveholding critic of Sandiford's work to expose the bankruptcy of arguments based on the *ad hominem* fallacy:

But O! Say the Slave-keepers, and must confess in their Hearts that Book, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, as it is call'd, and titled; it tells Tales to the World, sets forth to the World's People, what a Parcel of Hypocrites, and Deceivers we are, under the greatest appearance and Pretentions to Religion and Sanctity that ever was in the World; we'll censure him, and his Book too, into the Bottomless Pit if we can . . . we'll condemn *R.* in his Grave, and his Book and all that favour it, or promote its being spread abroad, or being read, that exposes us, and we'll expose that, or especially him that writ it, by Calumnies and Slanders, and Surmises, and by insinuating all that ever we can hear or think of against him, now he is in his Grave; especially we did it before, but now more safely, for he can't contradict or oppose us now; so that if we can but render him odious in Character, his Book will be invalidated.¹⁵

Even allowing for Lay's tendency to dramatize the iniquity which he perceived, this caricature, of which the above is only an extract, provides striking evidence of the effect Sandiford's book had had on the terms of the slavery debate in Pennsylvania, and tells us that the battle lines were more polarized than ever. Lay's representation of the embittered slave owner also suggests that slaveholders, Quakers among them, were increasingly on the defensive, and increasingly willing to single out individuals on whom to heap their opprobrium. Sandiford, it is always argued, would respond badly to this treatment. According to Lay, Sandiford "was in great Perplexity of mind; and having oppression, which makes a wise man Mad . . . he was brought very low." Later, Lay

relates that “by reason of his sore affliction of mind, concerning Slave-keeping . . . he fell into a sort of Delirium.” Sandiford’s death at the age of forty was certainly premature, and his alleged mental illness may well have been exacerbated by the attacks made upon him by proslavery Friends. The additions to the second edition of his book, however, suggest that he took a more robust approach to the criticisms leveled at him than to promptly fall into terminal despondency. The rhetoric of the additions is both acutely aware of the political realities of the day, and of the need to convince both church and state of the iniquity of slavery. He thus presents a range of material, in a variety of genres and registers, in an attempt to reach and to persuade a wider audience than he had in the first edition.¹⁶

Sandiford’s intention to broaden his appeal begins without delay. Immediately following the title page of *The Mystery of Iniquity*, the reader encounters not a biblical text but a paraphrase of a section from Daniel Defoe’s poem *The Reformation of Manners*, which had been published in London in 1702. Defoe’s treatment of those who “seek out to *Africk’s* Torrid Zone/And search the burning shores of *Serralone*” is noteworthy, argues James Basker, because of Defoe’s early “criticism of the hypocrisy of Christians owning slaves, a theme that would recur ubiquitously in the antislavery literature of the next 160 years.” It was this theme which attracted Sandiford, and which he attempts to emphasize in his rewrite—although it cannot honestly be said that Sandiford’s alterations have in any way improved Defoe’s text. The significance of the paraphrase lies not in its artistic merit but in that Sandiford is providing an authority from beyond the Quaker community and a rhetoric from beyond the jeremiad.¹⁷

The six-page letter that follows the poem makes similar attempts to reach a wider audience since it is addressed to both the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the London Yearly Meeting—and, indeed, “unto all the Churches of Christ.” Sandiford commences by outlining to these other churches the political processes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1729 in relation to slavery, and his description provides further evidence that the “Debate Thereupon,” which the clerk noted involved an acrimonious exchange. “There is such a spirit raised amongst us” Sandiford writes, “that divers friends have come to our yearly meeting

under the burden of it, but were so strongly opposed, that that matter was left to our next yearly meeting." This strong opposition appears to have come from senior members of the community, for Sandiford next asks his readers for their "help against the mighty, that we as a community may clear ourselves." At the heart of Sandiford's rhetoric is a rallying call for the underdog, and there is no doubt that he saw the position of weighty Friends on slavery as a question of power within the Quaker community just as much as he saw himself as an aggrieved victim of an overmighty leadership. This "help against the mighty" is needed, he argues, so that "the heathen may not have cause against us, nor the weak go out of the way, nor the burden of the strong be encreased; for truly had I been committed as threatened by our chief judge, in the face of our annual meeting, for printing the ensuing treatise, and distributing them at my own charge, to clear my conscience, it would not have moved me from my foundation, knowing that my God is over all, and the truth I witnessed over them that oppose my testimony against this trade." The language is that of the divinely inspired Christian martyr standing up for his beliefs in the face of a venal and corrupt church. Such rhetoric was a familiar part of Protestant discourse in the early modern period, found throughout John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563) as well as permeating accounts of Quaker "sufferings" from the mid-seventeenth century onward. It is a reflection of the close identification between "church" and "state" in Pennsylvania that this rhetoric is being uttered by a Quaker, positioned in opposition to what he views as a corrupt Quaker hierarchy, rather than being voiced by a protestant or nonconformist bearing witness against Catholic or Anglican corruption. Sandiford's exasperation with his leaders is confirmed when he states that the purpose of this second edition of his book is to encourage other Friends to "introduce the matter to the helm by which the body is governed, that the ax being laid to the root we may be delivered from the corruption it brings forth among us." Although such attacks on church leaders are less threatening to Quakers than they would be within an episcopalian church, this is nonetheless a belligerent approach, not likely to win Sandiford friends. He is similarly unlikely to make friends in the Pennsylvania Assembly when he turns on them for reducing the duty on imported slaves to forty shillings—although, as we saw in Chapter 3,

this was done at the order of the Privy Council. He is not wrong, however, when he points out that this measure “makes a revenue of the evil instead of removing it.”¹⁸

Sandiford all but concludes the prefatory letter to *The Mystery of Iniquity* with one of the earliest attacks on slave trading to include a description of a slave market, and one of the earliest discussions in antislavery literature of conditions for slaves in the middle passage. This detailed and harrowing description was no doubt informed by Sandiford’s personal experience in Philadelphia, South Carolina, and the Caribbean. Sandiford warns his reader that “it would fill a volume to relate the base original of this trade, and their severity and poverty in their passage.” He nevertheless manages to cram a shocking picture of the slave trade into just a few lines. Speaking of the enslaved, he relates that:

They are a naked figure at their first landing in the *West Indies*, that the buyer may inspect even their secret parts, lest they should be corrupted in their passage by the debaucheries of those that are called Christians; . . . under such circumstances the poor creatures easily transgressing, are whipped naked to common view, until their secret pores are shamefully extended beyond what may be rehearsed unto chaste ears; and also for seeking their liberty, racked and burned to death, as lately at the *West Indies*.

This image of the slave trade is brutal and visceral. Literary critics in the school of Marcus Wood might draw attention to its resemblance to sadomasochistic pornography. Certainly, Sandiford’s disgust with the treatment of slaves focuses both actually and figuratively on the ways in which they are sexually abused. Their “secret parts” are inspected for sexually transmitted diseases, and their “secret pores” are “shamefully extended” while they are “whipped naked.” Sandiford no doubt objectifies the bodies of the people he describes, but his description seems intended to horrify and to goad his readers into action. Such outrages are intrinsic to the slave trade throughout the Atlantic world, he implies, and are not merely confined to Barbados. Leaving the West Indies,

Sandiford returns "to the churches of *Philadelphia*, who to my greatest wonderment were all defiled with it." Significantly, Sandiford uses the word "churches" rather than "steeple houses" or "meeting houses." He singles out neither Anglicans nor Quakers for particular blame but, rather, the city's entire Christian population. He reiterates this by asking that the matter be considered by "the bishops and ministers of all churches; for it is the select in all that are redeemed from these pollutions, who are the true catholick church of Christ."¹⁹

Sandiford's final argument in this addition, surprisingly, is neither religious nor humanitarian in character. Instead, it is an argument that slavery hinders immigration and disrupts the economic development of the colony. "Here is an open country (were slaves kept out)" he argues, noting that "some who through the divers misfortunes incident in humane affairs, being reduced where slaves abound, have starved for want of business, for the rich need not, and the poor could not employ them." The arguments resemble those made just a few years earlier during the founding of the colony of Georgia, which as an experiment had been declared free of slaves. As Christopher Brown has noted, Georgia's founders "built on a developing interest among improving patricians to make American settlements promote the rehabilitation of the poor and relief of the persecuted." As with those of Georgia's founders, Sandiford's arguments tap into a vein of colonial self-interest as well into a well of humanitarian sentiment. In this, Sandiford is again broadening his appeal and widening the scope of his work. It is fair to say that in this second edition the book has been transformed from a narrowly theological set of objections to slavery to something approaching a general statement of antislavery based on a group of complementary principles drawn from both religious and secular sources.²⁰

This sense is reinforced, albeit only partially, by a reading of the new "Postscript in a Letter to a Friend," which adds another eighteen pages to the end of the book. Much of this repeats both the tone and the substance of the core of the book, but there is some new material here, as well as the fruits of additional research: As with the paraphrase of Defoe's poem at the front of the book, Sandiford is keen to find authorities from beyond Quaker or Pennsylvanian circles. He accordingly provides lengthy quotations from both Thomas More's *Utopia*

(ca. 1516) and Morgan Godwyn's *The Negro's and Indians advocate* (1680). Nevertheless, his final substantive demand in the book is tightly focused on the changes he wished to see take place in the Pennsylvania Assembly, and the doleful effects he concluded would result from continued toleration of slavery and the slave trade. Anticipating Lord Acton's celebrated dictum that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," Sandiford argues that "*such as can sacrifice that true British Spirit, to purchase Slaves, must need be corrupt in the Government, and more especially in Offices of Trust; who having broken the Royal Law of Humane Nature in the greatest Degree . . . may very well subvert Justice in the lesser.*" His final thoughts are thus an appeal to reject the growth of tyranny in the colonial legislature, and to protect the economic rights of poor colonists, whose wages are depressed when they have to compete in the same labor market as slaves. "*With what Care ought we then to reject such out of the Legislative Power,*" he argues, "*lest we be brought into the same Captivity, and the Liberties and Privileges of so free a Colony and beneficial Commonwealth to poor People be destroyed, as it is in the West-Indies, and measurable so here, by setting up the Rich in Arbitrary Power, and the total Hindrance of the Poor from Bread, or at best level their Labour at the Price of Bondslaves; and where shall we and our Children then be?*" Sandiford, then, while certainly a religious enthusiast who often let his spiritual rhetoric obscure the sense of his argument, was nonetheless enough a man of the Enlightenment to be concerned with the management of the colonial economy, and to proclaim the ideals of political liberty based in natural rights. His rhetoric may not have been without impact too. In the autumn of 1730, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting discussed, as agreed, what their official line on slavery and the slave trade would be. Reports came in from five quarterly meetings, not including Chester, whose views were already well known. Two of the meetings, Philadelphia and Bucks, deferred judgment to the Yearly Meeting, the latter noting that they "could not so far agree, as to come to any Result about it." Two more, Shrewsbury and Gloucester-Salem, reached the firm decision that, in Shrewsbury's phrase, "the Practice of buying Negroes is wrong and therefore they Desire Friends may be restricted from purchasing of Them for the Future." That left only Burlington, who "having seriously and deliberately considered the

said Proposition” came to the clearly reluctant view that importing slaves “is not agreeable to our Discipline” and that Friends should thus be discouraged from doing so. Burlington’s reluctance is evident from a coda to their report: “yet it is the Desire of that Meeting, The Restriction to be made may not extend Further than Advice and Counsell, not Censure.” In other words, Burlington are requesting the Yearly Meeting do no more than restate their position of 1716, in which “it is desir’d that friends generally do as much as may be avoid buying such Negroes as shall hereafter be brought in, rather than offend any friends who are against it. Yet this is only caution and not Censure.”²¹

Were the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting a true democracy, it is plain that with three quarterly meetings firmly against the buying and importing of slaves, one reluctantly against it, and two undecided, the Meeting would have no choice but to come out strongly against buying slaves whatever their origin. Quaker decision-making processes are not quite so clear-cut. “Having maturely Deliberated thereon,” the Meeting decided only to consider “the purchasing of such Negroes as may be hereafter Imported” and finally reached the decision that “Friends ought to be very Cautious of making any such Purchase for the Future; It being Disagreeable to the Sense of this Meeting.” The advice was thus not to buy slaves who had been imported, from Africa or elsewhere, because such activity would encourage the importation of further slaves. The implication was that it was an acceptable practice to buy slaves who were already in the colony because they had been born there or because they had been there for many years. This was hardly the unequivocal statement that Sandiford and Chester Quarterly Meeting had been hoping for—indeed, it did little more than restate the advice of 1716 and, without the addition of the important word “censure,” it seemed as though Burlington had got their way.

There was, however, an important advance. The Yearly Meeting decided to recommend “to the Care of the Several Monthly Meetings, to see that Such who may be, or are likely to be found in that Practice, may be admonish’d and caution’d how they offend herein.” While admonishment and caution are not enough to prevent Friends from involvement in slave trading, since no formal act of exclusion from business meetings could follow the caution, the Yearly Meeting’s decision

nonetheless facilitated a significant extension of antislavery discourse into the spoken discourse of Quaker communities of the Delaware Valley. From this point, monthly meetings are required to investigate members who own and who trade in slaves, and to admonish them accordingly. While this process may not have held many terrors for the thick-skinned, for most Friends the fear of undergoing the embarrassment of public admonishment must have acted as a deterrent. More crucially, the idea that "the Practice of buying Negroes is wrong" is henceforth structured into the essential business and the ordinary language of the local monthly meetings. Thus, an important result of the decision of 1730 to charge monthly meetings with the task of monitoring and chastising slave trading and slaveholding in their local communities was that the discourse of antislavery would become an increasingly important part of Quaker identity in the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

One final point deserves our attention. After the meeting of 1727 which prompted this debate in Pennsylvania, the London Yearly Meeting had also written to Friends in New York and Rhode Island. Quakers in these communities had also been pondering the problem of slavery, albeit without the same vigor or degree of divisiveness as in Pennsylvania. In 1733, Elihu Coleman, a Quaker from Nantucket, took the text of a short pamphlet arguing against slavery to the New England Meeting in Newport, Rhode Island, to ask permission that it be published. Newport was at that time an important slave-trading port, and so Coleman could not have been sure of a positive reception. Perhaps mindful of the letter sent six years earlier from London, aware of the recent debates in Philadelphia, or merely keen to allow an unknown Friend to have his say quietly without unseemly debate or dissension, the New England Overseers of the Press gave their blessing. *A testimony against that antichristian practice of making slaves of men* thus became the first officially sanctioned antislavery text in the Quaker tradition. Whether official sanction made a difference is a moot point. Frost, somewhat predictably, argues that the pamphlet had "little impact." In this instance he might be right. Drake's view is that the pamphlet "sounded faintly if at all in the Quaker citadel of Philadelphia." Again, this seems likely. It looks very much as if Coleman, having made

his stand, returned quietly to Nantucket and made no further attempt to influence Quaker thought. Nevertheless, although he laments that slavery “has been carried on so long pretty much in Silence,” Coleman was clearly aware of the debates taking place elsewhere since he also notes that “there is many sober Men that has spoken against this Practice, both by Writing and in their publick Assemblies, whom I could name.”²² Although *A testimony against that antichristian practice* would not go on to be among the most influential Quaker antislavery texts, its existence alone shows that the Quaker discourse of antislavery was no longer confined only to Philadelphia and London.

Stunts and Harangues: Benjamin Lay Calls on All Slave-Keepers

For five years after 1730, Philadelphia Quakers appear to have agreed to let the matter lie. Certainly, there is no record in the minutes that slavery was discussed in the Yearly Meeting in that period. After 1735, the debate resurfaced again, and the slavery question is thereafter raised at almost every Yearly Meeting for a decade. This decade-long debate is examined in more detail at the end of this chapter. First, however, we should consider Benjamin Lay, perhaps one of the best-known antislavery Quakers from this period, and his book of 1738, *All slave-keepers, that keep the innocent in bondage, apostates*, possibly one of the least-read Quaker antislavery texts ever written. The reason for Lay’s notoriety is simple, as is the reason why he is seldom read. While the blood-and-thunder of his jeremiad is approachable today only with the most profound effort of will, Lay’s various antislavery stunts speak vividly to an age that views nonviolent direct action as an essential part of protest politics. Lay is thus a curiously liminal figure. The book belongs to an older tradition, but his techniques of direct action anticipate the tactics of later protesters.

Most of what we know about Lay comes either from his own work, from Roberts Vaux’s 1815 biography of Lay and Sandiford, from Lydia Child’s slightly embellished edition of Vaux’s biography, or from Benjamin Rush’s short “Biographical Anecdotes of Benjamin Lay.” Lay

was born into a Quaker family in England in 1677, traveled extensively as a seaman, and spent some time in Barbados before settling in Philadelphia in 1731. In Barbados he developed an intense hatred of slavery, which aroused the animosity of the Barbadian planters, who effectively forced him out of the island. Slavery was only one of Lay's causes; he was also a vegetarian who opposed the use of tea, tobacco, and alcohol. By all accounts he was an eccentric and somewhat pugnacious character, lacking or rejecting basic social skills and prone to offending those whose morality deviated even fractionally from his own strict standards. At the same time, he appears to have been sincere in his beliefs, active in his opposition to injustice, and generous with his limited resources. He ended his days living in a cave in Abington, Pennsylvania, occupying himself with his books and his garden, disowned by the wider Quaker community. Historians have been just as unforgiving. "In the antislavery campaign among Friends," argues Sydney V. James, "the career of Lay reached the high-water mark of eccentricity and futility," although David Brion Davis was prepared to concede that "if Benjamin Lay was not quite sane, one should remember that the sanest minds found excuses for Negro slavery."²³

Lay's most famous stunts are detailed in Vaux's biography, while Child adds a few more. It is from Child that we learn that Lay smashed teacups in the marketplace and tobacco pipes in the meeting house and that he had a habit of attending services of many denominations, dressed in sackcloth, to harangue any slaveholder he saw there. Vaux tells us that Lay thrust his exposed arms and legs in the snow outside a meeting house. When Friends asked him if he was suffering, he reportedly admonished them with the words "*you pretend compassion for me, but you do not feel for the poor slaves in your fields, who go all winter half clad.*" Somewhat less sympathetically, Lay once abducted his slaveholding neighbors' child. When they approached Lay in some considerable distress to ask if he had seen the boy, Lay is said to have replied: "*Your child is safe in my house, and you may now conceive of the sorrow you inflict upon the parents of the negroe girl you hold in slavery, for she was torn from them by avarice.*"²⁴ Such actions most likely antagonized the people Lay needed to win over. This can be seen in the reaction to his most famous stunt, the infamous "bladder of blood" incident, which took place at the

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for 1738. Lay, writes Vaux, "having previously prepared a sufficient quantity of the juice of poke-berry (*Phytolacca decandra*) to fill a bladder, he contrived to conceal it within the cover of a large folio volume." Donning a sword and military coat, which he covered over with a Quaker's plain coat, Lay addressed the congregation in the following manner:

"Oh all you negro masters who are contentedly holding your fellow creatures in a state of slavery during life, well knowing the cruel sufferings those innocent captives undergo in their state of bondage, both in these North American colonies, and in the West India islands; you must know they are not made slaves by any direct law, but are held by an arbitrary and self-interested custom, in which you participate. And especially you who profess '*to do unto all men as ye would they should do unto you*'—and yet, in direct opposition to every principle of reason, humanity, and religion, you are forcibly retaining your fellow men, from one generation to another, in a state of unconditional servitude; you might as well throw off the plain coat as I do"—(here he loosed the button, and the great coat falling behind him, his warlike appearance was exhibited to his astonished audience) and proceeded—"It would be as justifiable in the sight of the Almighty, who beholds and respects all nations and colours of men with an equal regard, if you should thrust a sword through their hearts as I do through this book." He then drew his sword and pierced the bladder, sprinkling its contents over those who sat near him.²⁵

The incident is often reported, but Lay's rhetoric is rarely discussed. This is perhaps because Vaux's report of the event comes to us third-hand. He tells us in a footnote that "The particulars of this singular transaction, and the speech were related to Dr. John Watson, deceased, formerly of Bucks County, by his friend and neighbour, the late Jonathan Ingham, Esquire, who was a witness of the scene." There is no evidence beyond this note that Ingham did indeed witness the scene. He is not

listed in the minutes as being one of the representatives present at the meeting, although he may have been there in some other capacity. It is possible, probable even, that the speech is an imaginative reconstruction or faded memory of a long-ago event, tidied up by the witness, his neighbor, and the memorialist. Reconstruction or not, it is nonetheless clear that the speech that has come down to us is entirely within the Quaker antislavery tradition that, by the 1730s, must have been familiar to most of the Friends attending the meeting. In this account, Lay opens by reminding those present of the suffering that slavery causes, with the implication that it threatens the Peace Testimony. He challenges the legal status of slavery, which is not "any direct law," thus implying that the practice is man-stealing. He follows this with the inevitable appeal to the Golden Rule before concluding with the point, originally made by George Fox and reiterated from the Germantown Protest onward, that the state of slavery in America continues "from one generation to another" rather than being terminated after a set period of time as the Bible seemed to command. These arguments had been made so often over the preceding fifty years that there can be little doubt that those present would have known them well. This perhaps explains why Lay felt the need to resort to dramatics to emphasize his point. Whether they had any immediate effect is a moot point. Child adds that after the berry juice had been sprinkled over those nearby, "the people supposing it to be blood, thought he had killed himself; and several of the women fainted. The deception was soon discovered, and Benjamin was carried out and laid on the door-step. There he remained, till the meeting broke up, and the congregation had stepped over him. When they had all departed, he rose up and went his way also." There is something rather affecting in this image of the lone protester being gently, but firmly, carried out of the meeting house and then ignored to the extent that he is stepped over and finally left entirely alone. The pathos may well be Child's invention, but the story is typical of what we know of Lay's *modus operandi*. Before we dismiss it too quickly as merely an eccentric stunt, however, we should note that it is to this day one of the best-known incidents in the early history of Quaker antislavery. It seems clear that those present, such as Jonathan Ingham, both recalled and recounted the event throughout their lives and that, through the mouths

of such as John Watson, it entered into the oral tradition. Whatever the immediate reaction of those unlucky enough to have been spattered with pokeberry juice might have been, in the longer term the stunt no doubt raised awareness of the antislavery message. Quaker antislavery discourse must always have occupied private conversation more than printed texts and minuted meetings. If nothing else, Lay's stunts will have provoked a great many conversations between friends and neighbors like Ingham and Watson. Indeed, "his peculiar principles and conduct," argued Benjamin Rush in 1798, "rendered him to many, an object of admiration, and to all, the subject of conversation."²⁶

Lay realized that the antislavery message could not be communicated through direct action alone. In 1737, he asked Benjamin Franklin to print a run of books which Lay would hand out for free. *All slave-keepers, that keep the innocent in bondage, apostates* is a rambling, incoherent pamphlet of almost three hundred pages that has probably never been read in much detail, even by those few who shared Lay's antislavery views and spiritual outlook. Historians have clearly found it tough going. Drake and Soderlund make no attempt to read it at all. Frost omits it from his anthology of Quaker antislavery texts. Davis mines it for autobiographical details but does not quote from it. Brown summarizes the text in three sentences. These omissions are understandable since Lay's book is a challenging read. Presented with, for example, a rant against sinfulness that extends across several pages without either a full stop or a mention of slavery, the ostensible topic of the book, a modern reader is apt to feel somewhat disengaged. Nevertheless, as Davis discovered, the key is to read it as life writing rather than as an ordered statement of Lay's political and spiritual views. Readers seeking a consistent argument or a structured narrative will be disappointed. Readers seeking an insight into the life of an eccentric but sincere Quaker will find richer rewards.

The story goes that Lay presented Franklin with a heap of unnumbered papers, telling him that he might print it in any order he pleased. Despite this, whether Lay's doing or Franklin's, an order is apparent. The text follows a broadly chronological structure which betrays its origins as a journal. For example, under the heading "*Abington, the 18th of the 2d month, about 6 or 7 at night*" Lay writes, "*Dear Friends, As I was*

at work in the Garden, it came into my Mind, that many of our Preachers would or did make Preaching so common, that many of our young People, and old ones too, did not much matter it." The discussion that follows, like many in the book, has little to do with slavery. Instead, we read Lay's undiluted thoughts jotted down that evening in his garden and resurrected for publication. Along with many others, this diary entry recording Lay's thoughts is structured as a letter to other Friends. Letter-writing is central to Quaker discourse and is inspired by both biblical epistles and George Fox's habit of writing to his many outposts. Lay's model is therefore not as eccentric as it may initially seem. Once we have grasped that this book is by turns journal, confessional, and commonplace book, we are far better placed to understand its relationship with Quaker antislavery discourse.²⁷

That relationship is displayed in two main forms: testimony and argument. These are what remain once we strip away the rambling exegeses, the fulminations against sinfulness, and the irrelevant digressions. Divested of these, Lay's three hundred pages would boil down to a reasonably focused antislavery pamphlet of, say, thirty pages. Where the text has attracted attention at all, it has been Lay's testimony that has come first. Without doubt, Lay was shocked by what he encountered in his time in Barbados, and this sense of shock permeates his graphic accounts of plantation life on the island. He worked there as a shopkeeper, and tells us that "the poor Blacks would come to our Shop and Store, hunger-starv'd, almost ready to perish with Hunger and Sickness . . . and my dear Wife would often be giving them something for the Mouth, which was very engaging you that read this may be sure, in their deplorable Condition. Oh! my Soul mourns in contemplating their miserable, forlorn, wretched State and Condition that mine Eyes beheld." This is one of several passages in which Lay recounts his wife Sarah's reaction to the horrors of plantation life rather than his own. One particularly vivid passage describes Sarah's continuing response to an incident that took place in Speightstown which, after Bridgetown, is the largest town on the island and to this day pronounced "Spikestown":

My dear wife has often spoke of a Passage in or near
Spike's in Barbadoes; going hastily into a very plain-coat outside

Friend's House, there hung up a Negro stark naked, trembling and shivering, with such a Flood of Blood under him, that so surprised the little Woman she could scarce contain; but at last a little recovering, she says to some in Family, *What's here to do?* They began exclaiming against the poor miserable creature, for absconding a day or two, may be by reason of his cruel Usage, as by this Barbarity we may imagine.

Even after many years, the memory of Sarah Lay's trauma has affected her husband's ability to write dispassionately. The hasty, almost telegraphic, style and the odd phrasing testify to Lay's heightened emotional state while writing this but also encourage an emotional response in the reader. This is typical of Lay's technique. The barbarities he has witnessed in both Barbados and Pennsylvania undoubtedly prompt Lay's genuine anger, but it is a "righteous anger" that he wants others to share and which is an important part of his rhetorical ethos. His account of his time in Barbados is shot through with rage at the "slave-keepers," as he calls them, who are "proud, lazy, dainty, tyrannical, gluttonous, drunken, debauched Visitors, the Scum of the infernal Pit." It is difficult to make psychological assessments of those long dead, but it often seems that Lay's anger with the slave-keepers mirrors a deep dissatisfaction with himself that borders on self-loathing. Despite his attempts at charity, despite speaking out, along with Sarah, against the cruel treatment of the enslaved, and despite his refusal to own slaves himself, he still feels implicated in the brutality of slavery. "I must confess," he tells us, "and I have not full peace without it, yet I may say I have been sorely grieved to see and hear the inexpressible Cruelty, Torture, and Misery, these poor Wretches were and are put to, Night and Day, yet for want of dwelling near enough to the blessed Truth, I was leavened too much into the Nature of the People there." This becomes a problem, he admits, when "whole droves" of Africans would come into his shop and rob him in what he thought were planned and coordinated shoplifting episodes. Some of the group would distract him and Sarah:

So when we were in a hurry, one would run away with one Thing, another with another, and so on. Very much we

lost to be sure. Sometimes I could catch them, and then I would give them Stripes sometimes, but I have been sorry for it many times and it does grieve me to this Day, considering the extream Cruelty and Misery they always live under. Oh my Heart has been pained within me many times, to see and hear; and now, now, now, it is so.

The triple repetition of “now, now, now” seems more than merely a rhetorical gesture. It appears violent, self-loathing, and possibly self-harming. It is in any case a testament to just how profoundly Lay was transformed by his Barbados experiences, and it demonstrates a genuine and lasting regret for his former actions. After several decades have passed, Lay is still painfully aware of how implicated he had become in the violence of the Barbados slave system, even to the extent of whipping people. Quakers adhered to the Peace Testimony and were required to repudiate violence. Lay’s sense of his own sinfulness derives from his realization that he had allowed himself to be drawn into a system of violent crime and retribution, but it is also a reminder to other Quakers that slavery could not be consistent with the Peace Testimony. Both the anger and the self-loathing seem genuine, but this passage is also a strategic intervention in the slavery debate.

Lay’s personal testimony is undoubtedly the most powerful argument he has to make against slavery, but it is not the only one. Interspersed throughout the book are scriptural, humanitarian, and economic arguments against slavery. Few of these are new. Lay repeats what many other antislavery Quakers had said before: that slavery is man-stealing, that it infringes the Golden Rule, that it violates the Peace Testimony, and that eternal bondage without possibility of emancipation has no scriptural authority. It certainly did not trouble Lay that these were not original ideas. He believed that all slaveholders were apostates, that is, that they had abandoned the true faith in the pursuit of material gain. Opposition to slavery was a divine injunction, and therefore all antislavery arguments derived directly or indirectly from God, either from scripture or through those whom God had inspired. His book is accordingly strewn very liberally with biblical quotation and allusion, but he also makes his debt to earlier antislavery Friends very

clear. Quakers, he writes, “have writ and bore Testimony against this Sin at times, near 50 Years, but were reproached for that likewise; but some are gone to their Graves in Peace; many yet living; as in *Pennsylvania, Jersey, Long-Island, Nantucket, Old England*, which I have been with at their Houses, and their Writings are extant as this time to my certain knowledge.” Lay’s fifty years takes him almost precisely back to 1688, the year of the Germantown Protest, and strongly suggests that he was aware of that event. His account of his reading and travels shows that antislavery discourse was not merely confined to printed texts, but was also developing in the conversations that took place in Friends’ houses. Lay’s text may not have directly touched many hearts and minds, and it is hard to imagine that it became an important source for later anti-slavery writers, but it clearly emerged from a discourse of antislavery that was increasingly widely dispersed throughout the Atlantic world.²⁸

From Rhetoric to Ritual

Recent historians have tended to see Lay as a marginal figure whose eccentric testimony could safely be ignored by the Quaker mainstream. To a certain extent this may be true. No doubt many Friends found his stunts and his antislavery zeal embarrassing. At the same time, most historians see the 1730s and ’40s as a period of Quaker inaction on slavery. Jean Soderlund, for example, notes the Yearly Meeting’s advice of 1730 “to be very Cautious” about buying imported slaves but argues that “for the next twenty-three years, this is as far as the Yearly Meeting would go. Not even Benjamin Lay could rouse them from their torpor.” This is somewhat unfair. In the period when Lay was performing his stunts, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was in fact regularly raising the slavery question and regularly seeking assurance from monthly meetings that Friends were obeying the advice “to be very Cautious” about buying imported slaves. Such assurances had been sought at least from the 1735 Yearly Meeting, two years before Lay published *All slave-keepers, apostates*, which somewhat suggests that Lay’s campaign was nearer to the mainstream than is often recognized. In fact, rather than being a period of “torpor,” the period 1735-43 marked a profound shift

in the attitude of Philadelphia Quakers toward buying imported slaves, a shift which can be traced in part by following the minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.²⁹

This process began with a simple but repeated request that Friends follow the advice of 1730. The minutes for 1735 note that “This Meeting also agreeable to former advice thinks proper to repeat the Caution to Friends against encouraging the Importation of Negroes by buying them after imported.” This caution was reiterated the following year, but with an added request: the Meeting “recommends it to the several Quarterly Meetings Meetings, [*sic*] belonging to this Meeting, to be careful in the Verges of the respective Meetings in this Particular.” In other words, the Yearly Meeting is no longer merely throwing out generalized advice but delegating responsibility to the quarterly meetings to ensure that the advice is made clear to everyone within their jurisdictions, or “verges.” This request suggests that some of the monthly meetings, charged with this duty in 1730, were not doing as asked. To enforce this, the Yearly Meeting is establishing a clear chain of command.³⁰

The following year, the screw was tightened even further. In addition to repeating the former advice, the Yearly Meeting now also asked “the several Quarterly Meetings belonging to this Meeting, not only to be careful in the Verges of their respective Meetings in this particular, but to return an Account thereof to the next Yearly Meeting.” Not satisfied merely with delegating responsibility to the quarterly meetings, the Yearly Meeting was now holding them to account. For the third year in a row, their authority in this matter had been incrementally extended.³¹

The fourth year would demonstrate how successful the policy had been. After hearing oral reports from delegates from the quarterly meetings, as well as enjoying the dubious pleasure of being spattered with pokeberry juice in Benjamin Lay’s famous protest, the Yearly Meeting again advised against buying slaves “after importation.” “Divers Friends in this Meeting,” the minutes note, “express their satisfaction in finding by the Reports of the Quarterly Meetings that there is so little occasion of Offence given by Friends concerning encouraging the importing of Negroes—and this Meeting desires the Care of Friends in their Quarterly and monthly Meetings in this particular may be continued.”

The reminder to all present that there was “little occasion of Offence” was no doubt a pointed rebuke directed personally at the easily offended Benjamin Lay. Indeed, he was formally disowned at this meeting and the clerk “ordered to draw an Advertisement to be printed in the newspapers at Philadelphia. In order to inform all whom it may concern that the Book lately published by Benjamin Lay Entitled &c^a. was not published by the Approbation of Friends, that he is not in Unity with us.” The advertisement appeared in at least two newspapers. Despite this extraordinary step, however, there is evidence to suggest that Lay’s message was getting through and that slaveholding was becoming increasingly less acceptable in Quaker circles. Jean Soderland has demonstrated, through an analysis of tax and probate records, that ownership of slaves among the leaders of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was declining sharply in this period. In the period between 1706 and 1730, she shows, 88.9% of the representatives from Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting owned slaves. From 1731 to 1753 that number declined to 64.0%. Other quarterly meetings showed even steeper declines in this period: Slaveholding among representatives from Bucks dropped from 50.0% to 9.1%, and in Shrewsbury from 50.0% to zero. While the statement “that there is so little occasion of Offence given by Friends concerning encouraging the importing of Negroes” no doubt underplays the true amount of slave trading taking place while neatly sidestepping the question of buying slaves who had been born in America, it is nonetheless hard to avoid concluding that, by 1738, Friends in the Delaware Valley had very much reduced the practice of buying slaves who had recently been imported from Africa.³²

After this moment of self-congratulation, the Yearly Meeting might well have chosen to rest torpidly on their laurels, but they did not do so. Instead, they continued to press the message home. The minutes for 1739, 1741, and 1742 all contain nearly identical notes repeating “their Caution against Friends importing of Negroes, and against buying them after they are imported and that the Quarterly meetings make reports of their Care herein to the next Yearly Meeting.” (It is not clear why they chose not to make the same point in 1740.) It appears that these repeated cautions did have an effect on some friends. John Woolman, who would later be celebrated for his antislavery role, reports

in his journal for late 1742 or early 1743 that he “felt uneasy” when he wrote a bill of sale for a slave which his employer was selling to an elderly Quaker. He temporarily “abated” this uneasiness by speaking out against slavery to those involved in the sale, but when shortly after another Quaker asked him “to write an instrument of slavery,” he declined to do so. Significantly, it was not just Woolman who was uneasy on this occasion. Woolman “spoke to him in good will,” and the other Friend told him that “keeping slaves was not altogether agreeable to his mind, but that the slave being a gift to his wife, he had accepted of her.”³³

Woolman's example suggests that, by early 1743, the buying and selling of slaves was the cause of some social embarrassment for Quakers. It is also further evidence that discussion of the morality of slaveholding took place outside meeting houses as well as within them. In the same year, however, the minutes of the Yearly Meeting make their last mention of slavery for almost a decade. This is not because the Yearly Meeting is dropping the issue. On the contrary, it takes the important decision to incorporate the advice of 1730 into a central ritual of the Quaker community. From 1682, Friends attending quarterly meetings had been asked a series of questions about who had died, who had been imprisoned, and “How the Truth has prospered amongst them since the last yearly meeting, and how Friends are in peace and unity?” These questions, referred to then and now as “queries,” were soon expanded in scope and number. By the early eighteenth century, the queries had become one of the most important rituals of Quaker worship. They were not fixed, however, but could be amended by a yearly meeting. Accordingly, in 1743 the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting revised their queries, drawing up a new list of twelve questions. They directed “that these Queries may be read in the several monthly and preparatory Meetings within the Verge of this Meeting at least once in each Quarter of the Year to the End that the Overseas or other weighty Friends may make such answers to them as they shall be able to do and their respective Circumstances may require. The Members of such Meetings may by this means be from time to time reminded of their Duties.” Even without formal powers of sanction or censure being invoked, considerable social pressure would have been placed on Friends to conform to

expectations at these meetings by giving the correct answer. It is important, therefore, that Question 11 of the queries is, "Do Friends observe the former advice of our Yearly Meeting, not to Encourage the Importation of Negroes nor to buy them after Imported?" With this query, the commitment not to buy imported slaves is transformed from being merely another piece of advice handed out by the Yearly Meeting to being a central part of the essence of Quaker identity in the colony. To put it another way, from this point onward, weighty Friends in the Delaware Valley are required to stand up four times a year and affirm that they and members of their community have not bought imported slaves. Whether intentionally or not, the Yearly Meeting had given the discourse of antislavery what was perhaps its most important boost at any point during the eighteenth century since: by allying it so closely with their group identity, they made it almost impossible for any Quaker to purchase imported slaves without very publicly admitting to having betrayed their friends, families, and community. At a stroke, Quaker antislavery rhetoric became Quaker antislavery ritual. The psychological impact, no less than the political impact, of locating antislavery discourse at the heart of Quaker identity in this way cannot be overemphasized.³⁴

“A practice so repugnant to our Christian profession”

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON, 1753–61

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THE WRITINGS and arguments that finally convinced Quakers in Philadelphia and London to institute an enforceable ban on Friends participating in the slave trade. This transformation was completed within a decade. At the start of 1753, Philadelphia Quakers were still bound only by the Yearly Meeting's advice of 1730 “to be very Cautious” about buying imported slaves. By 1761, Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic had agreed to prevent Friends from taking part in “the unchristian traffick of dealing in negroes.” In just eight years, the views of abolitionist Friends in the Delaware Valley had become official and enforceable Quaker policy worldwide. No doubt to their disappointment, this did not mean an overnight end to Quaker involvement in the slave trade, nor was there an immediate ban on keeping slaves. Nevertheless, after 1761, Friends around the world progressively began to extricate themselves from slave trading and increasingly divested themselves of their slaves. At the same time, antislavery Friends tentatively began a campaign to abolish slavery and the slave trade throughout the Atlantic world.¹

The outcome of the antislavery campaign launched in the late eighteenth century is well known. This chapter charts only the processes and texts of the 1750s that led to the origin of that campaign. These turn out to be surprisingly few and surprisingly brief. They include the

thirty pages of John Woolman's *Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes* (1754), the eight pages of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Epistle of caution and advice, concerning the buying and keeping of slaves* (1754), and the eleven pages of Anthony Benezet's *Observations on the enslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes* (1759). The reason for these pamphlets' brevity, it would appear, is that by the 1750s Quakers were very well aware of the arguments against both slavery and the slave trade that had been made over the previous decades. Woolman and others therefore had no need to rehearse the arguments at length because they had already been won. Accordingly, while Woolman's earlier pamphlet still makes some efforts to persuade Friends unconvinced of the antislavery cause, the Yearly Meeting's epistle does not need to persuade but instead expects to be obeyed. Likewise, the rhetoric of Benezet's tract is not directed toward Friends in the Delaware Valley at all but is instead the opening shot in the campaign for a complete abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. This chapter, and this book, thus concludes by showing the effect the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's decision had on the London Yearly Meeting early in the 1760s.

Preparing the Ground

Winning the argument is not the same as winning the day. For most of the first four decades of the eighteenth century, the Quaker leadership in Philadelphia were not prepared to go any further than discouraging Friends from buying recently imported slaves, although this was in itself a more radical moral position than that taken by any other organization at the time. Antislavery arguments were thus increasingly articulated in both meeting houses and Quaker homes, and Quakers were regularly examined to ensure that they had not purchased any newly imported slaves. They were not asked outright to stop buying slaves, however, nor were they asked to emancipate those slaves they already owned. Thus, in the 1740s, we have a classic Quaker compromise. Friends have to promise that they will not buy imported slaves, although if they do there is no real sanction other than peer pressure, while at the same time they

are still permitted to buy and to own slaves who were born locally. Clearly, this was not a stable arrangement.

While there were limits to what Quaker leaders of the early 1740s thought was possible or desirable, Jean Soderlund has demonstrated that in the late 1740s there was a profound shift in their membership. "Leadership of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," she argues, "passed from a predominantly conservative, slave-owning oligarchy controlled by Philadelphia and Burlington Friends to a more reform-minded and geographically diverse group." Soderlund's carefully compiled figures show a marked decline in slave ownership among the Philadelphia Quaker leadership as the eighteenth century progressed. Between 1706 and 1730, more than three-quarters of the leadership owned slaves. This dropped slightly to two-thirds between 1731 and 1751. After the mid century, however, there was a steep decline so that in the crucial years of 1752–56, fewer than one in three Quaker leaders owned slaves. From this evidence, argues Soderlund, "we can see how direct interest in slavery was present to influence the early leaders' views on the issue, and we can sketch out changes in the power structure of the meeting between the 1730s and 1750s that subsequently facilitated antislavery reform." Soderlund admits from the outset that "we cannot know from the following evidence alone *why* the meeting leaders came to oppose slavery." Nevertheless, her argument that "direct interest in slavery was present to influence the early leaders" implies an economic answer: the early Quaker leadership opposed outlawing slavery or the slave trade because they benefited from it economically. Essentially, then, Soderlund argues that Philadelphia Quakers embraced antislavery only when the value of slavery to them had declined significantly. This argument closely mirrors the well-known "decline thesis" proposed by Eric Williams in the 1940s. In his important *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams argued that the British government did not outlaw the slave trade, and later slavery itself, until the profits of slavery had very considerably declined. When first proposed, the decline thesis was an important corrective to the self-congratulatory story told by earlier historians of the abolition movement. In Williams's view, British abolitionism was not founded in an outbreak of national virtue, but in cynical calculations about profit and loss. The decline thesis has now been tested by several

historians, and it has been shown that Williams's figures do not add up. British slave-traders and plantation owners were making considerable profits from slavery right up to the moment when their practices were made illegal. Of course, this does not alter the self-congratulatory tone of much early writing on abolition, but it does suggest that the rise of British abolitionism in the late eighteenth century owed more to cultural decisions about what was morally acceptable than it did to simple economic calculations.²

Soderlund's data can be considered in the light of this wider debate about British abolitionism. Soderlund clearly shows that slaveholding among Quaker leaders declined sharply in the 1740s, but she does not show why it declined. Some interpretation of recent work into the demographics of Quaker slaveholding may be helpful here. Slaves acquired by the first generation of Quaker settlers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century would only rarely have survived past the 1730s, and it appears that they had relatively few children. According to Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, "Philadelphia slaves were not able to make the transition to a self-sustaining population that blacks in the Chesapeake colonies achieved by the 1720s and 1730s . . . thus, the city's pre-Revolutionary slave population, though women and men might find mates, could not replenish itself and required continued importation for growth." On this evidence, it is likely that many Quakers were merely choosing not to replace slaves as they died, but it is possible that they were taking more active steps to reduce the number of people they held in slavery. Soderlund does not find that in life Friends were actively manumitting slaves in this period, but she does show that in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the 1720s-40s, "the percentage of participants who owned Afro-Americans declined slowly as the proportion of slaveholders manumitting their blacks in their wills increased." It is also possible that Quakers were selling slaves to non-Quakers in order to be clear of slaveholding but without losing money. If this is the case, historians have yet to provide detailed evidence for it.³

Ultimately, the argument that Quaker ownership of slaves declined because the slave population was not self-sustainable depends on Quakers not replacing their slaves when they died. This requires us to ask why they did not replace their slaves. The economic explanation is

that it was simply no longer profitable to buy slaves. Soderlund shows that the price of buying slaves was relatively low at the start of the 1740s, rose slightly by 1750, dropped back somewhat in the mid-1750s, and then rose steeply in the late 1750s as a response to the outbreak of war, partly because the war disrupted supply and partly because the availability of free labor declined. The lower prices of the 1740s might reflect decreased demand, increased supply, or a combination of both, but they do suggest that buying slaves was relatively affordable. The cost of slave labor is therefore unlikely to explain why Friends increasingly turned away from buying slaves in the 1740s. All things considered, the most likely explanation is that a younger generation of Friends, brought up in a climate where antislavery discourse was current, were asserting the values of their generation by choosing not to replace the slaves that they inherited from their parents when they died, or choosing not to replace the slaves that their parents manumitted in their wills. This implies that the debates of the past half century had had considerable cultural influence. Although the impact of statements such as the Germantown Protest, the 1696 advice, or the 1730 advice could not be directly or immediately measured, they represented a substantial cultural investment in antislavery, and this investment was rewarded in the 1740s when a new generation assumed the leadership. Quaker slave ownership appears to have declined in the 1740s because the arguments had been won in the 1730s and before.⁴

By the end of the 1740s, antislavery discourse was widespread in the Quakers' oral culture, but it was not yet sanctioned in printed texts. Again, Soderlund has provided important information to help us understand why. She shows that membership of the Overseers of the Press, the committee charged with censoring Quaker publications, changed significantly in the late 1740s and early 1750s. As late as 1747, the Overseers of the Press appear to have censored antislavery sentiment from Thomas Chalkley's *Journal*, an account of his various travels through Europe and the American colonies. By the last years of the decade, therefore, the issue had been fudged. Friends are strongly encouraged not to buy slaves, but are censored and censured when they want to formalize or publicize that sentiment. More confusingly still, while they have to promise that they have not bought imported slaves,

they are still permitted to own slaves who were born closer to home. This was not a stable arrangement, and it is no surprise that individual friends must have found it confusing. The question was raised at the Buckingham Monthly Meeting in 1753 and, there being no clear advice, the question was passed up to the Buckingham Quarterly Meeting for clarification. The query was not on this occasion passed to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, but even without this formal maneuver, the query once again put the vexed question of slavery into the public sphere. This time, Philadelphia Quakers would at last find a resolution to their debate over the slave trade, but not without a further five years of discussion.⁵

John Woolman Considers the Keeping of Negroes

Until this point, few of the individuals whose writings are examined in this book have been widely known, even to historians of slavery and abolition. George Fox is of course an important figure to Quakers, Francis Daniel Pastorius is familiar to scholars of early America, while Benjamin Lay is still remembered in Philadelphia. But none of these are recalled today as well as John Woolman, whose journal continues to be read, not only by scholars and students, but also by general readers attracted by Woolman's lucid writing style as much as his deep faith and gentle, unimpeachable, morality. Consequently, much has been written about Woolman's antislavery work and, for once, no one claims that his work lacks importance or impact. On the contrary, Woolman is often portrayed as the man who so tweaked the Quaker conscience that the Society of Friends felt compelled to outlaw slavery. The titles alone of some works on Woolman demonstrate the extent to which he has been canonized: *The Mind of the Quaker Saint*, *The wisdom of John Woolman*, and *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition* are just three, among many more. Other historians have presented calmer analyses, but just barely. David Brion Davis, for instance, observes that we cannot quite "say that a John Woolman . . . single-handedly awakened the world." Nevertheless, he argues, "the self-effacing Quaker was a major instrument of the transformation."⁶

Most discussion of Woolman's role in galvanizing Quaker opinion centers on his own testimony. This can be found in his journal, which was not published until 1774, two years after his death. While it is therefore an important reflection of the debates of the 1740s and '50s that concern us here, the published journal was not itself a text that contributed to those debates. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 4, Woolman records several moments of doubt he had concerning slavery as early as 1743. Crucially, he also records that his doubts led him to speak out against slaveholding, at first in private conversation and later in the Quaker meetings to which he traveled across the colonies. At times, he indicates that his doubts were shared by others, and this is further evidence for the existence of an emerging oral discourse of anti-slavery in the period. As I have shown throughout this book, Quaker antislavery discourse predated Woolman by many years. Nevertheless, Woolman's testimony and, in particular, his interventions in the crucial years of 1753 and 1754, were important factors in the crystallization of a Quaker antislavery policy for Pennsylvania.

Woolman's life history is well known and can be briefly summarized. Born into a New Jersey Quaker family in 1720, he appears to have spent his teenage years in some spiritual turmoil, although he had resolved these doubts by the early 1740s. More prosaically, he was establishing himself in trade, first as an assistant to a shopkeeper and later as an apprentice tailor. As we saw in Chapter 4, it was at this time that he "felt uneasy" when asked to write a bill of sale for an enslaved person whom his employer was selling. This was the first of many occasions when he felt compelled to speak his mind and, as he grew older and traveled farther afield, he came into contact with increasing numbers of people to whom he could make clear his belief that slavery was incompatible with the principles of Quakerism. As we shall see, he played a pivotal role in the discussions about slavery that took place in Philadelphia in the 1750s. In the following decade, however, his lifestyle grew more peripatetic, his views on many social and spiritual issues hardened, and his personal manner grew noticeably more eccentric. He became a prolific writer of tracts and essays, but his constant traveling must have taken its toll on his health. He traveled to England in 1772 but while there contracted smallpox and died. He is buried in York.⁷

Woolman's major contribution to the antislavery debate was to write the first authorized Quaker antislavery tract in Pennsylvania. The Overseers of the Press had not until now allowed Quakers to publish antislavery essays, leaving it to the cheerfully ecumenical Benjamin Franklin to print Ralph Sandiford's and Benjamin Lay's contributions. In 1753, however, the Overseers of the Press permitted Woolman's short pamphlet, *Some Considerations on the keeping of Negroes*, to be published and distributed, which it was the following year. Historians have seen this event both as a reflection of the demographic change in the Quaker leadership, and as an indication of Woolman's rhetorical skills. Despite in general being interested in issues other than rhetoric, for instance, Jean Soderlund foregrounds the nature and importance of persuasive language to the Quaker antislavery debate when she argues that the earliest Quaker spokesmen "were more radical and, considered eccentrics, revolutionaries, or both, were largely ignored. Then along came John Woolman who couched the same 'radical' message in moderate language." As this book has shown, earlier antislavery Quakers were ignored far less often than most historians suppose. Between them, they incrementally developed an antislavery discourse that led to slavery becoming a repeated topic of debate in Quaker homes and meeting houses. It remains true, nevertheless, that the work of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford represents a radical—and sometimes eccentric—extreme of a slavery debate that had far wider currency. We would do well, therefore, to ask whether Woolman's pamphlet is indeed radical, either in argument or in style, or whether it emerges from a more broadly established Quaker debate about slavery.⁸

Woolman's pamphlet opens with a relatively long introduction. This takes the form of a polite but firm intergenerational challenge, a reading that supports the hypothesis that Woolman's generation, steeped in antislavery discourse, were asserting their values by choosing not to engage in the slave economy that they had inherited from their parents. "Customs generally approved and opinions received by youth from their superiors," argues Woolman, "become like the natural produce of a soil." Nevertheless, one generation may discover that the practices of their parents run contrary to God's truth. In such circumstances, he reasons, "it would be the highest wisdom to forego customs and popular

opinions.” On its own, this can be read as a sufficiently tactful way of asking an older generation to make way for a younger one, but Woolman follows it up with further theoretical discussion of the relationship between parents and children. The affection between parent and child, he proposes, is “an instinct like that which inferior creatures have.” Fortunately, “our blessed Saviour seems to give a check to this irregular fondness in nature.” The text that supports this is Matthew 12:48–50, in which Christ implies that his followers are his true family and says that “whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” In Woolman’s exegesis, what is good for society therefore outweighs “natural affection,” and the way to determine what is good for society, inevitably, “is not to do that to another which (in like circumstances) we would not have done unto us.”⁹

Like that of all Quaker antislavery writers from the Germantown Protesters onward, Woolman’s ultimate argument is that slaveholding violates the Golden Rule. The complex justification for why the younger generation should act contrary to their parents if the good of society requires it is less clearly based on existing antislavery discourse, and suggests that deeper processes are at work. First, there is the personal context. Woolman’s father, Samuel Woolman, had died a few years earlier, and so the introduction could be read as the apology of a man striking out in his own direction after overcoming his grief. This is not entirely convincing, however. Later generations would learn from his journal that Woolman had started to write *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* as early as 1746 after returning from a trip to South Carolina. He showed the manuscript to his father, who “proposed a few alterations, and appeared well satisfied that I found a concern on that account.” On his deathbed in the autumn of 1750, Samuel Woolman even asked his son if he intended to submit the manuscript to the Overseers of the Press. Father-son rivalry does not seem to have been an issue in the Woolman family, at least not on the subject of slavery. Instead, it appears that Woolman has appointed himself not so much a spokesman for his generation, but an ambassador. The diplomatic language as much as the scriptural justification for a change in direction allow Woolman to reassure older Friends that they are being treated with all the respect that both “natural affection” and biblical authority

require, but no more. The biblical text he chooses shows Christ at his most radical, but also at his most social. Christ's ministry was a radical break with the past, and those who joined with him also joined a new society. Woolman's hint to his fellow members of the Society of Friends is that a break with tradition that serves a higher spiritual purpose may similarly achieve a greater temporal good and a stronger society.¹⁰

Woolman commences the main part of his pamphlet with another conciliatory message. He acknowledges that "there are many well-disposed persons amongst [slaveholders] who desire rather to manage wisely and justly in this difficult matter than to make gain of it." This is a different approach than to call his readers "apostates," "hypocrites," or "deceivers," as Benjamin Lay had done. To that extent, Woolman's language is indeed more moderate, although it is scarcely a noteworthy achievement to write with greater moderation than Lay. Nonetheless, this is a genuine attempt to engage with readers of all persuasions and to judge the action without judging the person. In a further consolation to wary readers, Woolman also signals that he is not about to offer uncomfortable or unpalatable descriptions of brutality against enslaved people. Instead, with a hint toward his own feelings in the matter—prefiguring the many sentimental antislavery texts that would appear later in the century—he notes only that "the general disadvantage which these poor Africans lie under in an enlightened Christian country [has] often filled me with real sadness." It is doubtful that this rudimentary sensibility succeeded in emotionally moving any of his readers, but it probably put many at ease and thereby secured the attention of more readers than Lay or Sandiford could have hoped for.¹¹

The argument of the following paragraphs contains a clear allusion to the two works of George Fox that Woolman is certain to have encountered. Woolman begins this section by asking his readers to "remember that all nations are of one blood." As evidence, he cites Genesis 3:20, which actually reads: "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." The phrase "hath made of one blood all nations of men" in fact appears in Acts 17:26, but as we saw in Chapter 1, it also appears in Fox's 1657 letter "To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves" as well as in *Gospel family-order*, the book Fox published in London that contained his detailed thoughts

on slavery. This is doubtless a deliberate allusion which many would have spotted right away. It allows Woolman to claim Fox's authority, as well as the Bible's, and to remind his readers of the existence of a long Quaker debate over slavery. Woolman does not, however, use the text to make precisely the same points as Fox. Instead, he warns the reader of the error of thinking that, because God appears to have placed American Quakers in a "higher station" than Africans, this "superiority" justifies any cruel usage. On the contrary, he argues that "when a people dwell under the liberal distribution of favours from heaven, it behoves them carefully to inspect their ways and consider the purposes for which those favours were bestowed." Thus, for the first time in Quaker antislavery rhetoric, Woolman addresses his readers as prosperous and comfortable members of an established community rather than exhorting them as sinful and avaricious colonists, concerned only for their own personal gain.¹²

In the central part of his pamphlet, Woolman returns to his main theme: the Golden Rule. He rewrites the conclusion to Fox's *Gospel family-order*, updating it for his times. Fox had ended his book by asking his readers to "consider with your selves, if you were in the same Condition as the Blacks are."¹³ Woolman's version does the same, but is more explicitly angled to counter a growing racial ideology that saw Africans as "a people froward, perverse, and worse by nature than others." Not only is this no justification for holding a people in slavery, Woolman argues, but it is factually incorrect. If Africans are indeed "froward" and "perverse," the cause is not nature but environment:

To prevent such error let us calmly consider their circumstance and, the better to do it, make their case ours. Suppose, then, that our ancestors and we have been exposed to constant servitude in the more servile and inferior employments of life; that we had been destitute of the help of reading and good company; that amongst ourselves we had had few wise and pious instructors; that the religious amongst our superiors seldom took notice of us; that while others in ease have plentifully heaped up the fruit of our labour, we had received barely enough to relieve nature, and being

wholly at the command of others had generally been treated as a contemptible, ignorant part of mankind. Should we, in that case, be less abject than they are now?¹⁴

This clever passage serves a double purpose. It is the pamphlet's only real discussion of the conditions of the enslaved, and, while it is not extensive, it is effective since it avoids attacking the reader but instead invites their sympathy for others. Once again, Woolman's rhetoric prefigures later sentimental arguments against slavery that sought to establish a sympathetic bond between the reader and the suffering enslaved people about whom they were reading. As with the earlier passage, though, this is not a fully formed piece of sentimental rhetoric even if it is successful in inspiring sympathy. Its principal object is to explicate the Golden Rule, reminding the reader that, to do to others as we would be done by them, we need to make a positive effort of imagination to predict how we might ourselves respond to the situations in which others may find themselves. To have any meaning, the Golden Rule requires us, as Woolman plainly states, to "calmly consider" the circumstances of others and to "make their case ours." In this instance, similar circumstances are likely to lead to similar levels of abjection. Woolman does not explicitly state what course of action we would wish others to take were we to find ourselves in this abject situation, nor does he offer any direct requests to slaveholders. He suggests only "that if we continue in the word of Christ . . . and our conduct towards [the enslaved] be seasoned with his love, we may hope to see the good effect of it." By leaving the precise nature of those good effects unclear, Woolman avoids getting bogged down in detail or speculation, a rhetorical strategy which allows his central moral message to sound clearly.

Woolman reiterates his message with a long discussion of the ways in which the Golden Rule, which has "a moral unchangeable nature," is also inculcated in biblical injunctions to show hospitality to strangers—something that slaveholders manifestly do not do. More radically in a pamphlet addressed to a community of businessmen, he next questions whether private profit can be put ahead of the needs of society, or at least of the Society of Friends. "If we do not consider these things aright," he argues, "but through a stupid indolence conceive views of

interest separate from the general good of the great brotherhood, and in pursuance thereof treat our inferiors with rigour, to increase our wealth and gain riches for our children, what then shall we do when God riseth up; and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him?" Woolman somewhat reverses the intergenerational position taken in the introduction when he questions the wisdom of heaping up riches for future generations, but it is significant that he falls just short of condemning the pursuit of profit per se. Instead, he worries only about profit that is divorced from the "general good" or which is obtained through "rigour," which is to say, violence. Woolman is at the outer edge of mainstream Quaker discourse at this point but he is careful not to cross over into radicalism. Indeed, he here retreats almost entirely from his subject. The final few pages of the pamphlet barely mention slavery. Instead, Woolman concludes with the observation that it is "a truth most certain that a life guided by wisdom from above, agreeable with justice, equity, and mercy, is throughout consistent and amiable, and truly beneficial to society." This conciliatory ending to a cautious pamphlet borders on platitude. While it may have dismayed the Lays and Sandifords of the community, its innocuous tone probably endeared the pamphlet's sentiments to many who had previously been cautious about taking sides in the slavery debate.¹⁵

Finally, we should note that what Woolman does not say is almost as significant as what he does. The most surprising omission is that there is no suggestion anywhere in the pamphlet that slavery is man-stealing. This argument had been a central plank of Quaker antislavery texts from the Germantown Protest onward, and it cannot be supposed that Woolman was unaware of it. It is never easy to explain an omission, but it may be that Woolman thought that accusing Friends of being complicit in kidnapping, theft, and murder would only antagonize the people he most wanted to convert. We should also note that Woolman has moved the argument on subtly but significantly from the advice that had been given in 1730. Then, and in subsequent statements, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had ruled only on "the purchasing of such Negroes as may be hereafter Imported," advising that "Friends ought to be very Cautious of making any such Purchase for the Future." Woolman's pamphlet is not about the *purchasing* of Negroes, however,

but the *keeping* of Negroes. Although on the surface his arguments and tone seem considerably less contentious than those of some earlier writers, Woolman is actually pushing forward the argument in more radical ways. Rather than attacking the trade in slaves directly, he is questioning the morality of all slaveholding. More importantly, he is doing so with the support of the Quaker leadership. For the first time, there seemed to be a real opportunity for antislavery Friends to tackle the slave trade in Pennsylvania by challenging the demand for slaves at the source.¹⁶

The Yearly Meeting's Caution and Advice

John Woolman's *Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* put antislavery arguments in a more moderate language, but the likelihood is that the book was probably never seriously intended to change anybody's mind. The arguments themselves had been lost or won more than a decade previously. Despite their immoderate language, or perhaps even because of it, it was almost certainly Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay, alongside less vocal supporters, who had changed the hearts and minds of a younger generation in the 1730s and '40s. Woolman's *Considerations* thus appeared in 1754 not because the time was right for further debate on the slavery question, but because the time was right for action. In the early 1750s, a new generation had taken over leadership of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and it appears that they chose Woolman as their champion and his text as the occasion to force through some more meaningful advice in a debate that, by now, had been dragging on for over sixty years. With Woolman's essay in the public domain and no doubt prompting discussion in Quaker circles, in 1754 the Yearly Meeting once again prepared to review the advice they would offer Friends in the Delaware Valley who were considering the purchase of slaves. As ever, we have little record of what was actually said at the Yearly Meeting concerning slavery, but there can be no doubt that on this occasion the matter was given serious attention. A decision was taken to write a substantial letter to be distributed to monthly and quarterly meetings in which the Yearly Meeting's position on slavery would

be clarified and expanded. Previous advice had usually appeared only in manuscript minutes or letters to Quaker community leaders. Unusually, rather than being passed around in manuscript, this *Epistle of caution and advice, concerning the buying and keeping of slaves* was ordered to be printed and widely distributed among Friends. It is likely, therefore, to have had considerable impact among Quakers in the Delaware Valley who could not have viewed its eight pages merely as a restatement of the status quo. Rather, it was visibly an important escalation in both the terms and the extent of the debate.¹⁷

The *Epistle's* primary authorship has been contested. It has been suggested that either John Woolman or Anthony Benezet may have been responsible. Benezet is a more likely candidate than Woolman since, as Soderlund points out, it was he who “laid the proposal to publicize Friends’ opposition to slave trading before the meeting.” In either case, the Yearly Meeting appointed a rather unwieldy committee of fourteen men “to review and consider it; and make such Alterations and Amendments, as they may judge necessary.” The document cannot, therefore, be read as the work of a single author. Nevertheless, the size of the review committee suggests both a high level of interest in the issue and a desire to ensure that a broad spectrum of viewpoints was represented. Ultimately, though, however divided the review committee might have been in private, the text of the *Epistle* as recorded in the minutes and shortly after put into print represented the hardest line on slavery that the Yearly Meeting had yet taken.¹⁸

The *Epistle's* language is less conciliatory than that of Woolman’s *Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, no doubt because the review committee felt that they could speak with authority. From the outset, the *Epistle* acknowledges the extent and the divisiveness of the debate that had taken place over the years: “It hath frequently been the concern of our *Yearly Meeting*,” it begins, “to testify their Uneasiness and Disunity, with the Importation and Purchasing of *Negroes* and other *Slaves*.” This forthright opening reminds us that by 1754 the leadership of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting recognized that the antislavery debate had had a long and contested history, and was most certainly not merely the occasional interest of a few hotheads and eccentrics. Indeed, they reminded their readers that “it hath been the continued Care of many

weighty *Friends*, to press those that bear our Name, to guard, as much as possible, against, being in any Respect, concerned in promoting the Bondage of such unhappy people." Again, the emphasis on the continuity of the Yearly Meeting's advice demonstrates that contemporary Quakers did not consider antislavery to be a new idea. It was also a reminder to other Friends that the advice on importing slaves that would be given in the *Epistle* was neither new nor radical. Despite this long-running debate, they observe with "sorrow" that the number of slaves "is of late increased amongst us." Slave ownership among Pennsylvanian Quakers was in fact declining at that point, but the same was not true for the colony as a whole. By the 1750s, Friends were a minority in Philadelphia, and, although they were buying fewer slaves, others continued to buy and sell slaves in great numbers. In any case, not all Quakers had ceased buying slaves. The Yearly Meeting sounds a note of exasperation in the *Epistle* when they explain their decision "to make our Advice and Judgment more public, that none may plead Ignorance of our Principles therein." Given that for the past ten years the Yearly Meeting's advice had been repeated in the quarterly meetings as part of the Queries to Friends, it is unlikely that any substantial Quaker would be genuinely ignorant of the advice. Instead, it seems more likely that slaveholding Friends were merely claiming ignorance, a loophole which the Yearly Meeting was clearly keen to close. Thus, the former advice is seemingly restated in the printed epistle although, in fact, on this occasion it goes considerably further. Rather than merely encouraging Friends to avoid buying imported slaves, the limited aims of the previous advice, the text now advises them "to avoid, in any Manner encouraging that Practise of making *Slaves* of our Fellow Creatures." This is further-reaching than the original advice but also much vaguer. As we shall see, this is a problem to which the Yearly Meeting would be forced to return after just a few years.¹⁹

Having stated their central advice, the authors devote the remaining pages of the *Epistle* to providing evidence for their antislavery position. The first, as one might by now expect, is an appeal to the Golden Rule, which they call the "royal Law." Those who observe the Golden Rule, they argue, could "never think of bereaving our Fellow Creatures of that valuable Blessing Liberty." In various guises, the same

argument is repeated three times throughout the letter. Their second major category of evidence is that purchasing slaves is inconsistent with the Peace Testimony. Slavery is “too often extreamly cruel! What dreadful Scenes of Murther and Cruelty those barbarous Ravages must occasion in these unhappy People’s Country, are too obvious to mention.” Their third piece of evidence is yet more combative. Slave trading, the authors argue, is “Man-stealing, the only Theft which by the *Mosaic* Law was punished with Death.” Woolman had avoided this argument entirely, presumably since it could not be made without the risk of alienating otherwise moderate Quaker slaveholders. The authors of the *Epistle* felt no such compunction. By putting it so bluntly they signal not only their intent to take firm action but also their willingness to offend if necessary. Finally, they argue that by “the frequent Separation of Husbands from Wives, and Wives from Husbands,” slavery promotes adultery.²⁰

It can readily be seen that the *Epistle* recapitulates in essence almost the entire Quaker debate on slavery since 1688. Indeed, although the language is considerably more refined and there is no mention either of Islamic slavery or of slave uprisings, the letter is otherwise remarkably similar in structure and argument to the Germantown Protest, albeit longer and more developed. Like that document, it makes its case plainly, invokes the Golden Rule, and shows that slavery is man-stealing, that it is inherently violent, and that it promotes adultery. Like the Germantown Protest, the 1754 *Epistle* also hints that withdrawing from slave trading is not enough for Quakers. In their final paragraph, the authors ask Friends “seriously to weigh the Cause of detaining [slaves] in Bondage: If it be for your own private Gain, or any other Motive than their Good, it’s much to be feared, that the Love of god, and the Influence of the holy Spirit, is not the prevailing Principle in you.” One wonders whether the irony in this line was intended. Surely no one present in the review committee could have thought that people kept slaves for any reason other than private gain. As with the forthright opening lines of the *Epistle* and the blunt equation of slavery with man-stealing, the conclusion betrays a willingness on the part of its authors to robustly engage with those Quakers who continued to own and to trade in slaves.²¹

One final interesting point about the *Epistle* is that its language contains sentimental undertones, which suggest that its authors were influenced, consciously or otherwise, by the latest literary fashions emanating from across the Atlantic. As Leonard Tennenhouse has shown, rather than attempting to create a distinctively American literature, "during the period from 1750-1850 American authors and readers were more interested in producing and consuming English literature." The same is no less true of the period before 1750. The sentimental novel had reached Philadelphia long before publication of the *Epistle* in 1754. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was published in London in 1740 and famously became the first novel printed in America when Benjamin Franklin reproduced a copy of the fourth London edition in installments over 1742-44. Franklin is unlikely to have reprinted *Pamela* purely for the benefit of the city's Quakers, but novels were not the only source of sentimental writing at this time. Sentimental poetry in particular crossed the Atlantic relatively easily, and the literature of sensibility was increasingly found in forms as diverse as conduct literature, magazines, belles lettres, and reportage. Works of moral sense philosophy by such thinkers as Francis Hutcheson and, later, David Hume and Adam Smith often reached Philadelphia via unauthorized Dublin reprints and may have been read by some Quakers. In addition, while Quakers were emphatically neither Congregationalists nor Methodists, they can scarcely have failed to be aware of the emotional "religion of the heart" popularized by such preachers as John Wesley and George Whitefield in the revivalist movement that would become known as the "Great Awakening." Sentimental literature was merely one facet of what Northrop Frye has called the "age of sensibility," a period marked by intense interest in the emotions in all their manifestations.²²

The Yearly Meeting's *Epistle* does not qualify as full-blown sentimental rhetoric of the type that would become the mainstay of the abolition movement in the 1780s, but it does make some tentative tugs at the heartstrings. Thus the authors argue that it is "a melancholy but true Reflection, That, where *Slave* keeping prevails, pure Religion and Sobriety decline, as it evidently tends to harden the Heart." The emphasis on melancholy emotions and the effect of slavery on the heart is typical of sentimental antislavery rhetoric. Typical too is its preference

for examining the heart of the slaveholder rather than the enslaved. This worry is reiterated a few pages later. The authors “earnestly recommend to all who have *Slaves*, to be careful to come up in the Performance of their Duty towards them, and to be particularly watchful over their own Hearts.” The Yearly Meeting’s *Epistle* was by any means an important step forward in the campaign against slavery but, like almost all eighteenth-century antislavery discourse before or after, it often seems more concerned with the hearts, minds, and souls of Europeans than of Africans.²³

Ending the Quaker Slave Trade

The Yearly Meeting’s *Epistle of caution and advice* would turn out to be the last major text of the early Quaker debate on slavery, but it was not quite the end of the debate. According to the minutes of the 1755 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, “The Committee appointed to gett the Epistle of Caution against the Purchasing of Negroes and other Slaves &c^{et} printed, Report it was done & dispersed thro’ the several Quarters soon after last Meeting.” By “Quarters” they meant quarterly meetings, ensuring that prominent Friends throughout the region had access to the text and would get the message that, as far as the Yearly Meeting was concerned, the debate had finally been settled. To all purposes it appeared that there was no longer a need for major writings to convince the leadership in Pennsylvania to take a stand. Nevertheless, after 1754, there was still a plethora of minutes requesting clarification, accompanied by exhortations to Pennsylvanian Quakers to heed the Meeting’s advice and pamphlets urging Friends beyond the Delaware Valley to oppose slavery. In large part, this was because the 1754 *Epistle* had not been phrased as clearly as it might have been. The following year, the Yearly Meeting sought to clarify matters by rewriting the queries that had made a commitment not to buy imported slaves part of Quaker ritual from 1743 onwards. The toughened Query 10 now asked: “Are Friends clear of importing or buying Negroes and do they use those well which they are possessed of by Inheritance or otherwise endeavouring to train them up in the Principles of the Christian

Religion?" This considerably extends the reach of the advice given the year before "to avoid, in any Manner encouraging that Practise of making *Slaves* of our Fellow Creatures" since such encouragement is now more precisely defined as "importing or buying Negroes," whether recently imported or not. In addition, Query 10 is now also concerned with the spiritual welfare of enslaved people, although it does not ask Quakers how they are ministering to their slaves' physical well-being.²⁴

From 1696 onward, Quakers in the Delaware Valley had been advised with increasing firmness to avoid involving themselves in the business of slavery. As many historians have pointed out, however, such advice invariably failed to specify ways in which offenders could be disciplined. As we have seen, the increasing prevalence of antislavery discourse produced its own momentum, leading antislavery sentiment to be incorporated into the Quaker ritual of the Queries. Alongside the continual conscience-tweaking of such Friends as Benjamin Lay and John Woolman, this without doubt increased the social pressure placed upon Quakers who bought and sold slaves. Nevertheless, every community includes individuals who are immune to such pressures. Friends who ignored or who were oblivious to the accelerating antislavery advice emanating from the Yearly Meeting could continue their business as usual without fear of any serious sanction. Thus, in 1755, the Meeting for the first time attempted to establish a disciplinary framework. The minute suggests that members of the Meeting were not entirely united in their views:

And the Consideration of the inconsistency of the practise of being concern'd in importing or buying Slaves with our Christian Principles being weightily revived and impressed by very suitable Advices and Cautions given on the Occasion, It is the Sense and Judgement of this Meeting, that where any Transgress this Rule of our Discipline The Overseers ought speedily to inform the Monthly Meeting of such Transgressions in order that the Meeting may proceed to treat further with them as they may be directed in the Wisdom of Truth.²⁵

There is something rather paradoxical in the image of an idea being "weightily revived." The tone is long-suffering too, although plainly the Friends there present knew they were dealing with an important issue and one that would not lie down. As always, the minutes give little inkling of the processes that led to Friends reaching the sense of the meeting, but the note recording that there were "suitable Advices and Cautions given on the Occasion" suggests that there were many contributors to the debate. The result of these deliberations was again somewhat less than clear, although the minute does make it plain that the injunction not to buy slaves is now firmly established as a "Rule of our Discipline." Those who broke the rule were to be reported to their monthly meeting, the members of which would talk to them, presumably sternly, about their actions. Beyond that, no form of discipline was specified, and it was left to individual monthly meetings to decide what they understood by "the Wisdom of Truth."

It would be easy to argue that all this dithering, all these attempts at clarification, and the repeated failure to establish an unambiguous disciplinary framework point to a lack of agreement among Friends. The cynical view would be to say that opposition to slave trading had become Quaker policy in form, but not in practice; that proslavery Friends had resisted antislavery Friends by accepting their arguments in public but not allowing them to be backed up with action. There may well be an element of truth to this, but it overlooks the fact that members of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were entering wholly uncharted territory and thus could have had little idea of the potential effects of their advice and rulings. There was no precedent for what they were doing, and this perhaps explains why they proceeded by trial and error rather than with a fully formed program of reform. To those involved in the process, each stage must have seemed like a sufficient or even final resolution of the problem. With hindsight, we can see that each forward movement threw up further issues that sooner or later would have to be resolved. In 1755, it may well have seemed entirely reasonable and sufficient that the community to which the offender belonged be allowed to determine the course of action, if any, that would be taken.

The advice of 1755 stood for three years. It might have been called into question rather earlier, but in the mid-to-late 1750s Pennsylvanian

Quakers were embroiled in considerable internal difficulties because of their response to the outbreak of war uncomfortably close to their colony. Known in the United States as the French and Indian War, the hostilities in North America were an early phase of a larger conflict, the Seven Years' War, which saw military engagements take place around the globe. When fighting broke out in the Ohio Valley in the spring of 1754, pacifist Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey a few hundred miles to the east were immediately alarmed. That alarm became a full-scale crisis when border skirmishes escalated into world war. Philadelphians raised a militia with Benjamin Franklin as its colonel but, obeying the dictates of the Peace Testimony, Quakers refused to participate or even to support military action. In June 1756, some of the colony's Quakers resigned from the colonial assembly and, in the words of Thomas Drake, "turned the government over to their belligerent fellow citizens." In fact, only six Friends resigned at first. Nevertheless, their resignation "began the slow exodus of Quakers from government which, by fits and starts, led twenty years later to the complete divorce of the Society of Friends from the state."²⁶

Many historians have concurred with David Brion Davis's argument that Quaker antislavery in Pennsylvania was crystallized into action by these events. "It is clear," argues Davis, "that this sudden stiffening of official policy was the direct response to a crisis brought on by the Seven Years' War." In the face of such certainties, Jack D. Marietta has sounded a note of caution. The crystallization of antislavery sentiment was just one of the "fruits of reformation," he argues, that "complemented other reforms." In a footnote, he adds that "Antislavery impulses, like other reform impulses, existed before 1755. They were among the causes of the crisis and changes of 1755 and later, as much as or more than they were the effects." Nevertheless, as Drake and Soderlund have suggested, the episode caused Friends to seek "new ways of expression . . . in moral self-examination and humanitarian activity" as well as in "reforms tightening the discipline on plainness in dress, speech, and personal belongings, taking oaths, participating in government, and marrying outside the Society." An increasing commitment to antislavery was one of these reforms. Despite this, however, it is important not to forget that Quaker antislavery discourse was very well established in the

colony by 1756. We must also be absolutely clear that the important decision to oppose slave trading *preceded* the crisis by two years. What followed two years later, in 1758, can be considered in part as a reaction to the withdrawal from government, but it also arose naturally from the less than clear advice of 1755, advice which itself arose from more than seven decades of debate. The crisis of 1756 did not create a Quaker discourse of antislavery, nor could it have influenced the decision of 1754 to issue the *Epistle of caution and advice*, but it may have given Friends in the 1760s the impetus they needed to make opposition to slavery a central part of their mission.²⁷

In the 1750s, Quakers in the Delaware Valley still had some way to go to persuade all friends of the centrality of that mission. The processes by which local groups attempted and sometimes failed to elicit a change in behavior are illustrated by a letter sent in August 1757 from James Logan to the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting. Logan takes an obstructive tone from the start, noting that two Friends, Daniel Stanton and William Brown, had “been to confer with me respecting my purchasing a Negro Lad inconsistent with & contrary to a late Rule or Law made by Friends against keeping Slaves for Life.” The visit was clearly resented, shown by Logan’s dismissive but no doubt strategic emphasis on the novelty of the advice and its questionable status as either rule or law. He also misquotes the rule as being “against keeping Slaves for Life” when in fact the Yearly Meeting had ruled only against buying slaves. Having sown some confusion, Logan then defends himself more vigorously:

I had been unsuccessful (as well as many others) in white Servants several having enlisted and prov’d bad & I found it difficult to hire Persons suitable to my Occasions & so determin’d to buy a Negro thinking he would answer my purpose better. But when I bought him I never intended to make him a Slave for Life unless he died early in his Age for I dislike the Practice as much as many others tho’ the Laws of our Country support me in it.²⁸

This section of the letter capitalizes on what must have been a genuine problem for all employers during a time of war. Pacifist Quakers

in particular might have reacted with sympathy and concern at the news that a Friend's servants had "enlisted and prov'd bad." This might have convinced some as being a plausible economic justification for his actions, but it was not a moral justification. The following sentence takes a more defensive tone and contains a jumble of unconvincing excuses. Logan first denies that he was to keep the young man in slavery for his entire life. In other words, he denies having committed the offense despite simultaneously giving justifications for why he did commit it. Second, he claims that he dislikes slavery as much as "many others." This formulation leaves open the possibility that many more do not dislike it and hints to the Monthly Meeting that he may have supporters. Finally in this extract, he appeals to the law of the colony and asserts that he was well within his rights. This is true, but it is a red herring. No one was accusing him of breaking the law of the land; he was accused only of breaking the rules of the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania.

If this letter is typical of the proslavery response to the 1755 ruling, it shows that some Friends were not going to give up their slaves without a fight. On the other hand, it also demonstrates that proslavery arguments were somewhat less sophisticated than they might have been. The Monthly Meeting considered Logan's arguments and found them "not fully satisfactory." Their response was to send William Brown back to the recalcitrant Friend, this time accompanied by the slightly more formidable antislavery campaigner Anthony Benezet. There are some indications that Logan was a problem case in other respects. The minutes ask Brown and Benezet "to continue their Endeavours to convince him of the Necessity of a Regulation in his conduct & particularly to excite him to more Diligence in the Attendance of Meetings for Worship." We cannot tell whether opposition to slavery was alienating Logan, or whether he disputed the new regulations on slavery because he was more broadly dissatisfied with Quaker discipline. Either way, slavery seems to have been only one of several issues affecting his behavior.²⁹

In the weeks and months after Logan took his stand, several monthly meetings began to ask awkward questions about the advice of 1755, questions which were promptly passed on to the relevant

quarterly meetings. In Pennsylvania, Philadelphia wanted to know “how farr Friends may proceed to Testify against the practice or those who persist therein,” while a little later Gwynnedd wondered “whether One Friend Selling a Slave to another Friend is an Offence.” In New Jersey, Woodbridge Monthly Meeting wanted “to know how far it may be approved of the Hiring of A Negroe Slave for A Number of years.” These somewhat technical questions clearly exposed the limitations of the 1755 advice, but they also demonstrate that the monthly meetings were genuinely engaging with it, either to apply it fairly or to expose its shortcomings. Regardless of the motivation, these discussions do reveal some genuine confusion. To address this, in February 1758 the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting appointed a “Committee on Negroes,” which in a report issued in August urged for the 1755 ruling to be strengthened. In New Jersey, the Shrewsbury Quarterly Meeting were moving in a similar direction. Still unable to reach a decision regarding “some uneasiness among Friends respecting y^e hiring of Negro Slaves for a number of years,” they “concluded to lay the Case before next Yearly Meeting.” With requests for clarification coming from several directions, the scene was set for yet another bout of discussion and clarification at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.³⁰

The Yearly Meeting of September 1758 would prove to be historic. To judge from the account presented in John Woolman’s *Journal*, that was not unexpected. Woolman had sat in the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting’s “Committee on Negroes” in the months preceding the Yearly Meeting and had heard the “weighty conference” that had taken place. He resolved to strengthen himself spiritually for the upcoming Yearly Meeting, which, in his words, “brought a weighty exercise upon me, and under a sense of my own infirmities and the great danger I felt of turning aside from perfect purity, my mind was often drawn to retire alone and put up my prayers to the Lord.” “Weighty,” or some close variant, is the most common word in Woolman’s account of this episode, and it cannot be doubted that Woolman and others were suitably impressed with the gravity of what they were undertaking. Unusually for such a meeting, we have some inkling of how the debate was conducted, for Woolman preserved his own contributions. “When this case was opened,” he records, “several faithful Friends spake weightily thereto, with which

I was comforted." By now, Woolman's own contribution must have carried considerable weight with the Yearly Meeting. His "mite," as he terms it, is characteristically subdued in tone but forthright in substance. He argued that:

In the difficulties attending us in this life, nothing is more precious than the mind of Truth inwardly manifested, and it is my earnest desire that in this weighty matter we may be so truly humbled as to be favoured with a clear understanding of the mind of Truth, and follow it; this would be of more advantage to the Society than any mediums not in the clearness of divine wisdom. The case is difficult to some who have them [slaves], but if such set aside all self-interest, and come to be weaned from the desire of getting estates, or even from holding them together when Truth requires the contrary, I believe way will open that they will know how to steer through those difficulties.³¹

Nothing in Woolman's rhetoric is directly calculated either to challenge or to embarrass any individual slaveholders, but his broader argument is as radical as anything proposed by Ralph Sandiford or Benjamin Lay. In asking Friends to establish a clear understanding of "the mind of Truth," Woolman places morality based both in scripture and in contemplation of the inward light before any material consideration. Indeed, he dismisses such considerations entirely when he rejects the possibility of any compromise, or "medium." He superficially appears to recognize that "the case is difficult" to Quaker slaveholders, but that crumb of comfort is quickly swept aside when he argues that a knowledge of the truth will allow such Friends "to set aside all self-interest." Ultimately, Woolman's argument is that morality always trumps economics, and that no compromise is possible. Highly principled, eloquently phrased, but rigid and unyielding, his short speech must have been greeted with dismay by the Yearly Meeting's remaining slaveholders.

Woolman himself gives some indication of the extent of the debate that followed, and he hints at some of the tactics used by proslavery Friends to prevent the Meeting from issuing an unambiguous ruling.

“And though none did openly justify the practice of slavekeeping in general,” he notes, “yet some appeared concerned lest the meeting should go into such measures as might give uneasiness to many brethren.” A rearguard action was clearly being fought in which the economic needs of a minority of slaveholding Friends were being used as a justification for inaction. Nevertheless, the fact that proslavery Quakers felt unable to “openly justify the practice” shows once again that the debate had been won long before this meeting took place. It was no longer socially acceptable to air proslavery opinions in public, and this social pressure was fatal for the defenders of slavery. By contrast, antislavery Friends could unleash the full force of their rhetoric. Woolman spoke up for a second time, arguing that “many slaves on this continent are oppressed, and their cries have reached the ears of the Most High!” Quakers must act without delay, he argued, to do God’s will in defiance of any local or individual economic need, for otherwise the consequences might be catastrophic. “Should we now be sensible of what he requires of us,” he reasoned, “and through a respect to the private interest of some persons or through a regard to some friendships which do not stand on an immutable foundation, neglect to do our duty in firmness and constancy, still waiting for some extraordinary means to bring about their [the slaves] deliverance, it may be that by terrible things in righteousness God may answer us in this matter.” To a community that had recently gone through the trauma of withdrawing from government over a war that many viewed as divine retribution, Woolman’s words must have seemed both prescient and prophetic. He did not speak alone: “many faithful brethren laboured with great firmness, and the love of Truth in a good degree prevailed.” The debate, it seems, continued for some time. Again, proslavery Quakers felt unable to speak openly, and eventually antislavery Friends won the day. Woolman’s account concludes by noting that “many Friends declared that they believed liberty was the Negro’s right, to which at length no opposition was made publicly, so that a minute was made more full on that subject than any heretofore.”³²

The minute to which Woolman refers is one of the more substantial entries in the eighteenth-century records of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and shows that the debate about slavery extended over several days. It began on 25 September with reports and queries from quarterly

meetings which together confirm that at the local level Quakers were uncertain how they should interpret and implement the advice of three years earlier:

From divers of the Reports it appears that there's too great a neglect in many who have Negro's to instruct them in the Principles of the Christian Religion: Friends of Shrewsbury and Woodbridge desire the Advice of this Meeting on the Case of one who hath hired a Negro for a Term of years, which occasions Uneasings among them. The Report from Philadelphia says that "there appears a living Concern in their minds to discourage the increase of the Practice of buying selling and keeping Slaves and their Hope being raised that the renewing the Consideration thereof in the Yearly Meeting may tend to strengthen the Exercise in the minds of Friends in general & engage us to take every Method in our Power consistent with true Wisdom & Charity to put a Stop to the practice; They therefore desire this Meeting to reconsider and explain the Minute of 1755 on this Subject.³³

This minute reveals that although quarterly meetings were united in thinking that the 1755 advice lacked clarity, they disagreed markedly in their interpretations of the advice. Although all of the reports display some measure of uneasiness about slavery, the extent of that uneasiness varies from one community to another. Many of the reports appear to have been more concerned with the spiritual welfare of the enslaved than with the possibility of their emancipation. Shrewsbury and Woodbridge were worried about their internal procedures. Only Philadelphia was pushing a strongly antislavery line at this point. The wide range of broadly antislavery views expressed in these reports, alongside the fact that it took several days before the Yearly Meeting reached a consensus, suggest that some work had to be done to establish a common language of antislavery, but it also confirms the sense we receive from Woolman's journal that proslavery Friends were resolutely defending their position.

Woolman does not discuss any behind-the-scenes negotiations, but these must surely have taken place in the four days between the reports from quarterly meetings and the debate at which Woolman spoke. It is thus likely that gentle persuasion in quiet corners had as much to do with reaching consensus as did open debate. In any case, the opening lines of the long minute that followed emphasized both the weight and the extent of the debate as well as the unity that it had finally produced. "After weighty Consideration," the secretary recorded, "of the Circumstances of Friends within the Compass of this Meeting, who have any Negro or other Slaves, the Accounts and proposals now sent up from several Quarters and the Rules of our Discipline relative thereto, much time having been spent and the Sentiments of many Friends expressed. There appears an Unanimous Concern prevailing to put a stop to the Increase of the practice of Importing buying selling or keeping Slaves for term of Life." By declaring that opposition to slavery is a "Unanimous Concern," the Yearly Meeting makes a far more powerful statement than it had done before. It is also significant that the minute spells out their opposition to every part of the slave system, from importing slaves to keeping slaves. This time, it is clear, they want no confusion over what they are advising. It is also significant that the document goes on to justify the reasons why the Yearly Meeting is adopting this policy. Such justifications are unusual in minutes of Quaker meetings, and one can only presume that, even at this supposed moment of unanimity, they are still fighting those who had resisted change. Two reasons are given. The first addresses concerns that were current in 1758, at the height of the Seven Years' War. The minutes note that "this Meeting very earnestly and affectionately entreats Friends individually to consider seriously the present Circumstances of these and the adjacent Provinces, which by the permission of divine Providence have been visited with y^e desolating Calamities of Warr and bloodshed, so that many of our fellow Subjects are now Suffering in Captivity." The implication that the war was divine retribution for the sinfulness of slaveholding is obvious, but this present-minded argument is melded to one of the oldest and most powerful Quaker arguments against slavery. In 1688, the Germantown Protesters had asked, "Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life?" Seventy years

later, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting notes that Pennsylvanians were at that moment being taken into captivity and immediately asks Friends to consider “The Injunction of our Lord and Master, ‘To do unto others as we would they should do unto us,’ which it now appears to this Meeting would induce such Friends who have any Slaves to sett them at Liberty.” This goes much further than previous vague advice, which aimed to discourage Friends from buying imported slaves or, as in 1755, “to avoid, in any Manner encouraging that Practise of making *Slaves* of our Fellow Creatures.” In this minute, the Yearly Meeting had at last invoked the Golden Rule as proof of the moral obligation all Quakers were under to immediately emancipate their slaves.

This was a radical turn. It ended official toleration of slave trading in the Quaker communities of the Delaware Valley and made slaveholding itself difficult to justify except where a Friend had existing slaves whom he or she could show were being treated well. The debate that had run more or less continuously in Pennsylvanian Quaker circles since 1688 had now apparently come to a close, and antislavery Friends had triumphed. Clearly buoyed by the sense that they had carried the day, the antislavery group ensured that this would not merely be a rhetorical victory. The same minute included both provisions for verifying that Friends were obeying the advice and—crucially—sanctions for those who did not. A committee of five prominent antislavery Quakers, which included John Woolman, was instituted to “visit and treat with all such Friends who have any Slaves.” To avoid any accusation that the Yearly Meeting was indiscriminately imposing its will on local communities, this committee was empowered to co-opt local “Elders or other Faithful Friends in each Quarter to accompany and assist them therein and that they may proceed in the Wisdom of Truth and thereby be qualify’d to administer such Advice as may be suitable to the Circumstances of those they visit.” The intention was clearly to provide sensitive and appropriately community-based support to those Friends who were now actively being encouraged to emancipate their slaves. It also significantly ramped up both social and institutional pressure that could be put on any remaining slaveholders. In this, the committee was supported by a profoundly important alteration to the rules of the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania, stated in the final part of the minute:

And if after the Sense and Judgement of this Meeting now given against every Branch of this Practice any professing with us should persist to vindicate it and be concerned in importing Selling or purchasing Slaves, The respective Monthly Meetings to which they belong should manifest their disunion with such persons by refusing to permitt them to sitt in Meetings for Discipline, or to be employed in the Affairs of Truth, or to receive from them any Contribution towards the Relief of the Poor or other Services of the Meeting.

This, then, was the ruling that antislavery Friends had sought for decades. Slave trading was now no longer merely passively discouraged but actively proscribed. Quakers who persisted in “importing Selling or purchasing Slaves” could be cut off from the social and economic networks that the Society provided. Opposition to slavery had nominally been the official position of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for many years, but, finally, the Meeting had established a clear policy, a disciplinary framework to support the policy, and a committee for enforcing it. It was no doubt something of a disappointment to anti-slavery Friends that slaveholding per se would not fall under this new discipline, despite being strongly condemned early in the 1758 meeting. Nevertheless, as Sydney James has put it, “by 1760 abolitionism had been accepted by the Quakers to the extent that they were considering no alternative.” In 1758, the leadership of the Yearly Meeting had sent a clear signal that while they disapproved of slaveholding in general, they were willing to act on slave trading immediately. Given the Yearly Meeting’s history of incrementally extending its authority in the matter of slave trading, few present could have doubted that slaveholding itself would shortly be in the Meeting’s sights.³⁴

Toward a Quaker Antislavery International

Quaker opposition to slavery had started in Barbados as a marginal view in a few letters and pamphlets by George Fox, William Edmundson, and Alice Curwen. It had been developed across seven decades in debate and

discussion by a range of Quakers, some of whom were eccentric outsiders and some of whom were deeply embedded in their communities. In 1758, discourse had become practice in the Quaker communities of the Delaware Valley. Needless to say, this did not signal the immediate end of slavery in the British colonies, nor even in the Quaker communities of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Nevertheless, to borrow the words of Winston Churchill, the 1758 decision was enough of a turning point that, although it did not mark the end of the Quaker abolitionist struggle, nor even the beginning of the end, it was clearly the end of the beginning. After 1758, although few beyond Quaker circles were even aware of the debates that had convulsed Friends in Pennsylvania, those Quakers who opposed slavery and the slave trade knew that a discourse of anti-slavery had succeeded once, and might succeed again. Accordingly, anti-slavery Quakers set about ensuring that Friends were obeying the injunction against slave trading by visiting those who continued to keep slaves and by demonstrating a willingness to enforce the rule. In February 1761, for example, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting made "manifest their disunion" with six Friends who had been "dealing in slaves." They did not confine their attentions to Philadelphia only. In a move that would have a direct bearing on the future of the transatlantic slave trade, they decided to broaden the campaign, first to Quakers in other regions, and shortly after to the wider world. Quakers, always assiduous correspondents, began to gear up the writing campaign that would transmit their ideas throughout the Atlantic world.³⁵

As we saw in Chapter 3, the London and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings were not always of a mind when it came to slavery. This was especially true in the early eighteenth century, but, by the late 1720s, London was itself edging toward an antislavery position, albeit one that was more idealistic than practical. Their advice of 1713, restated in the minutes of the London Yearly Meeting for 1727, "that y^e Importing negroes from their native Country & Relations by ffrriends is not a Commendable nor allowed practice," added to the growing chorus of antislavery voices, but was clearly ignored by slaveholding Friends in the colonies. Thereafter, with the exception in 1741 of a short printed letter to the colonies by a London Quaker, John Bell, London fell silent on the slavery question for thirty years.³⁶

In May 1758, the London Yearly Meeting decided to dust down their advice of 1727 and supplement it with a detailed condemnation of slave trading. The inspiration appears to have been a visit to North America by two British Quakers, Christopher Wilson and John Flint. Wilson, “finding freedom in his mind to make some further observations respecting his Travel in Pensilvania, Virginia, Maryland, some parts of North Carolina &c” presented a long account of his travels which appears to have been discussed for most of the afternoon of 17 May. A lengthy minute records that Wilson lamented that “in some places great injury seems to arive to our Society from the keeping of Negroes in their Service, as well as dealing in them.” The remainder of his account is structured so as to emphasize this point. In particular, Wilson contrasts the youth and vitality of Pennsylvania with the degeneracy of Virginia: “in Virginia particularly he gives sorrowful accounts of the State of Friends, who are much degenerated from the primitive practices of the Society in many respected, and who, in his judgment, have suffered much from the keeping of Negroes and letting fall their Christian Discipline.” Returning to Pennsylvania, he comments on “the youth in that country, and particularly in the City of Philadelphia, where many of the Youth of both sexes appear very solid & give strong proofs of a virtuous & Religious Conduct.” No further discussion of slavery is noted in the minutes, but the Meeting clearly felt strongly enough about it to ask Joseph Phipps and the committee responsible for the general epistle to insert a paragraph condemning the slave trade:

We also fervently warn all in Profession with us, that they be careful to avoid being in any way concerned, in reaping the unrighteous Profits arising from that iniquitous Practice of *dealing in Negroes and other Slaves*; whereby in the original Purchase one Man selleth another, as he doth the Beast that perishes, without any better Pretension to a Property in him, than that of superior Force; in direct Violation of the Gospel-Rule, which teacheth every one *to do as they would be done by*, and to do *Good unto all*; being the Reverse of that covetous Disposition, which furnishes Encouragement to those poor ignorant People to perpetuate

their savage Wars, in order to supply the Demands of this most unnatural Traffick, whereby great Numbers of Mankind, free by Nature, are subjected to inextricable Bondage; and which hath often been observed to fill their Possessors with Haughtiness, Tyranny, Luxury and Barbarity, corrupting the Minds, and debasing the Morals of their Children, to the unspeakable Prejudice of Religion and Virtue, and the Exclusion of that holy Spirit of universal Love, Meekness and Charity, which is the unchangeable Nature, and the Glory of true *Christianity*. We therefore can do no less than, with the greatest Earnestness, impress it upon Friends every where, that they endeavour to keep their Hands clear of this unrighteous Gain of Oppression.³⁷

Although much shorter, this statement is clearly influenced by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 1754 *Epistle of caution and advice* since it sets out almost the same arguments in almost the same order. Slave trading, Phipp's committee observed, was "in direct Violation of the Gospel-Rule, which teacheth every one *to do as they would be done by*, and to do *Good unto all*." This breach of the Golden Rule appeared to extend far beyond those who actively traded in or owned slaves since "all in Profession with us" are asked "to avoid being in any way concerned, in reaping the unrighteous Profits arising from that iniquitous Practice." It is not clear how far the words "in any way" might have extended. This may have been merely an emphatic phrase asking Friends not to buy or sell slaves under any circumstances. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as advice to Friends to stay clear of any branch of trade that involved slavery. If so, this must have made uncomfortable reading for Quaker merchants in England who might not have considered the profits they made from trading sugar from Jamaica, or ironmongery to Africa, the "unrighteous Gain of Oppression." Although the Yearly Meeting did not spell out precisely which branches of trade accrued the unrighteous profits of slavery, the statement implied that Friends were henceforth to examine their affairs and their consciences far more closely. In addition to violating the Golden Rule, the statement argued that the slave trade also infringed the Peace Testimony since it "furnishes Encouragement

to those poor ignorant People to perpetuate their savage Wars.” This concern for the welfare of Africans is doubly undercut, however, first by the insistence on their ignorance and savagery and second by the way the statement concludes with a greater concern for the moral well-being of Friends than with the rights of Africans. Slaveholders, it observes, are often characterized by “Haughtiness, Tyranny, Luxury and Barbarity” while owning slaves was “corrupting the Minds, and debasing the Morals of their Children, to the unspeakable Prejudice of Religion and Virtue.” As with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s *Epistle of caution and advice*, this piece of antislavery rhetoric seems ultimately more interested in the welfare of the enslavers than of the enslaved. Nevertheless, the fact remains that this message was sent out in the general epistle of which seven thousand copies were printed and distributed around the world. This represents a significant extension of antislavery discourse into communities which may not previously have given slavery any attention.

While the London Yearly Meeting was gearing up its antislavery campaign in the late 1750s, the international Quaker campaign against slavery received a new impetus in the shape of Anthony Benezet, whose writings would later influence an entire generation of abolitionists. Benezet had been becoming increasingly active in abolitionist circles from the 1740s, but his first printed intervention in the slavery debate was a short pamphlet called *Observations on the inslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes*, which was printed in 1759 and reprinted in a revised form the following year. In the revised second edition, the opening ten lines reproduce exactly the first ten lines of John Woolman’s *Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes*. This was not a cynical act of plagiarism but a gesture of solidarity and an acknowledgment on Benezet’s part that he was entering into a long-standing debate. In the event, Benezet transformed that debate. His method would reach its most sophisticated form in his celebrated *Some historical account of Guinea* (1771), but it is evident in this more rudimentary pamphlet as well. He makes good use of the standard Quaker arguments against slavery, such that it transgresses the Golden Rule, but he moves beyond these argument to pile up evidence from writers beyond Pennsylvania and from outside the Society of Friends. These include the Dutch

merchant Willem Bosman, the French trader John Barbot, the French colonial administrator André Brue, and the English geographer Joseph Randal, as well as an anonymous "person of Candour and undoubted Credit now living in Philadelphia, who was on a trading Voyage, on the Coast of Guinea, about Seven years ago."³⁸

Benezet's sources demonstrate his keen interest in voyages and travelers' tales, but they also reveal his deep respect for careful reasoning backed up by solid evidence. Although he was far from the intellectual centers of London and Paris, the eight pages of Benezet's first pamphlet display him as an able natural philosopher, a knowledgeable geographer, and a balanced historian. He also emerges as a man of feeling. As we have seen, John Woolman and the others who composed the 1754 *Epistle of Caution and Advice*, had already come under the sway of the burgeoning sentimental movement. Benezet takes this a step further such that we can see the deployment of a genuine sentimental rhetoric in his work. Thus, he invokes the suffering of "our poor Country Men" who were "dragged to Bondage and sold for Slaves" in the war at that point being fought in the colonies. In the face of such suffering, he asks, "what Heart so hard that would not melt with Sympathy and Sorrow?" In the hands of a proslavery apologist this would be a useful red herring, a sentimental diversion to distract attention away from the suffering of the enslaved. Benezet turns it round. "While our Hearts are affected for our Brethren and Relations, while we feel for our own Flesh and Blood, let us extend our Thoughts to others . . . I mean the *Slave Trade*." The underlying premise is based on the Golden Rule, the principle that guides most Quaker antislavery argument, but the language comes directly from the sentimental novel.³⁹

Benezet's use of fashionable language is important, be it the language of science, exploration, or sentiment. This is because his pamphlet was the opening shot in an international, ecumenical campaign against the slave trade. Although Benezet could not know it, that campaign would lead to the slave trade being outlawed across the Anglophone world by the start of the nineteenth century. What Benezet clearly did understand was that the campaign against the Atlantic slave trade must itself be a transatlantic campaign. The second edition of the pamphlet begins in Pennsylvania, by quoting the words of John

Woolman, but it ends in London by quoting the advice given by the London Yearly Meeting in 1758 that warned all Quakers “to avoid being in any way concerned, in reaping the unrighteous Profits arising from that iniquitous Practice.” Benezet’s pamphlet acts as a textual bridge between Philadelphia and London, affirming the unity of the Society of Friends but also emphasizing that the antislavery campaign, like the trade itself, was to span the Atlantic. It was crucial, therefore, that the text would sound authoritative in the metropolis as well as in the colonies. For its message to be heard, the pamphlet’s rhetoric needed to be up to date and neither subservient to the latest literary fashions nor doggedly (and woodenly) opposed to them. An important element of Benezet’s expertise as a writer was that ability to speak to audiences otherwise separated by wide social, religious, and geographical distances. In his later work, this ability would make his writing the first port of call for a generation of antislavery campaigners. This first pamphlet was probably read only by Quakers in Philadelphia and London, and yet it displays the technique that was to come.

How far Benezet’s pamphlet influenced the decision is not clear, but in 1761 the London Yearly Meeting banned Quakers everywhere from participating in the slave trade. As in 1758, the immediate impetus seems to have come from a traveler to the Quaker communities of North America. In the morning of 14 May, the Meeting heard that “our Friend John Storer being through the protecting Providence of the Almighty lately returned from his religious visit to Friends in America gave a Particular Account of the state of the Churches in those parts & that he was returned with peace in his own mind which account was in general to the Satisfaction of this Meeting altho’ some very sorrowful instances of declension appeared in some of the Provinces.” The minutes remain silent on the nature of these “instances of declension,” and likewise they do not state in which of the provinces Storer thought the Quaker communities were in decline. We also do not know whether Storer had been reading the antislavery texts of Woolman and Benezet. Nevertheless, we can assume that Storer’s account at least touched on the issue of slavery because, following a short adjournment, the Meeting returned to discuss that precise topic. The record of that discussion is short but surprisingly resolute:

This Meeting taking into consideration the former advice of this Meeting particularly in 1727 & 1758 against dealing in Negroes and having reason to apprehend that divers under our Name are concerned in this unchristian Traffic, do recommend it earnestly to the care of Friends every where to discourage as much as in them lies a practice so repugnant to our Christian profession and to deal with all such as shall persevere in a Conduct so reproachful to the Society & disown them if they desist not therefrom.⁴⁰

This was the unambiguous, international statement on slave trading that antislavery Friends had been campaigning for since 1688. In this short paragraph the Yearly Meeting emphasized the incompatibility of slave trading and Christianity with a triple repetition: slave trading is an “unchristian Traffic,” “repugnant to our Christian profession,” and “reproachful to the Society.” Like the 1758 Philadelphia statement, it was frustratingly vaguer than it might have been on the broader question of slaveholding. Nevertheless, Quaker communities “every where” were now encouraged to dissuade Friends from trading in slaves. Crucially, they were also empowered to disown any Quaker who continued to do so. Thus, this simple minute marked the end of official toleration of slave trading anywhere within the Society of Friends.

Despite the strength of this statement, antislavery Friends must have been frustrated to find that the Yearly Meeting did not reproduce it in its general printed epistle for 1761. Instead, they chose only to advertise it directly in epistles to two other yearly meetings. In their letter to the Virginia Yearly Meeting, London was at some pains to disaggregate the issues of slaveholding and slave trading. Praising the Virginian Friends for their “Christian care, respecting the Poor Negroes” they pointedly did not call for emancipation, “as Mercy appears to be more acceptable than Sacrifice.” Having reassured Friends in Virginia that they would not be asked to free their slaves, they nevertheless asked Virginia to maintain “the same steady Refusal to be any way concerned, or have any share in their Importation or Purchase, but to bear to the End, a faithfull Testimony gainst that avaritious & inhuman Traffick.”⁴¹ This was a cautious piece of advice, careful not to ruffle feathers in the

slaveholding communities of Virginia. By contrast, the letter to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which itself responds to Philadelphia's previous epistle, takes a far more robust tone:

We take particular notice of the hint toward the close of your Epistle respecting the inconsistency of that unrighteous Traffick of dealing in Slaves with our Christian profession; under a Sense whereof a Strong Minute has at this Meeting been agreed to, that such who are concerned in that trade after being duly admonished shall be testified against. And its particularly satisfactory to us to hear that a growing concern to discourage the same, prevails over the several provinces on the Continent in America.⁴²

Philadelphia's epistolary rhetoric, as well as John Storer's testimony, can thus be seen as part of the mix that led to the 1761 "Strong Minute." Once again, both deliberate and inadvertent dialogue between London and Philadelphia were the driving force behind the development and codification of the Quaker antislavery ethos. The discourse of antislavery, described by the London Yearly Meeting as "a growing concern," was by now clearly widespread among Quaker communities since its central arguments and rhetorical maneuvers were plainly being widely shared and frequently repeated. Although the Strong Minute was not included in the printed epistle for 1761, from the start of the 1760s Quakers everywhere would have begun to come under increasing pressure to dissociate themselves from the slave trade.

Change did take place more slowly than antislavery Friends might have liked. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, an internal campaign was needed to enforce the new policy since some Quakers continued to buy and sell slaves. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, antislavery Friends increasingly visited slaveholders in their communities to encourage them to follow the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's advice—and to discipline those who did not. Across the Atlantic, the London Yearly Meeting began to gear up its abolitionist campaign. Two years after the Strong Minute of 1761, the advice against slave trading made its way into the general printed epistle, where it gave every appearance of having

been written by a fan of the literary sensation of the moment: Lawrence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*:

We think it seasonable, at this Time, to renew our Exhortation, That Friends every where be especially careful to keep their Hands clear of giving Encouragement, in any shape, to the **Slave trade**, it being evidently destructive to the natural Rights of Mankind; who are all ransomed by one SAVIOUR, and visited by one divine Light, in order to Salvation: A Traffick calculated to enrich and aggrandize some, upon the Misery of others; in its Nature abhorrent to every just and tender Sentiment, and contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel.⁴³

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which appeared in installments between 1759 and 1769, was notable for its whimsical, sentimental style and for its typographical oddities. This passage contains both. The first is the decision to render the words "Slave trade" in a large, black-letter typeface. Quite obviously, this emphasizes the importance of the phrase and therefore the topic. Contemporary readers would have recognized deeper symbolisms, however. The black-letter typeface had been abandoned by British printers early in the seventeenth century, and was therefore associated with medieval backwardness and barbarity. Indeed, the following year, Horace Walpole used that association to establish the supposed antiquity of his Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, which, he claimed, "was printed at *Naples*, in the black letter, in the year 1529." A black-letter text clearly raised certain expectations in the minds of his readers, for he felt compelled to add that "The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism." The previous year, the Quaker who had written the advice on slavery in *The Epistle, from the Yearly-Meeting* clearly wanted his readers to understand that the slave trade was a Gothic horror with a strong savor of barbarism. It was also "abhorrent to every just and tender Sentiment," an indication that the author, like so many of the abolitionist writers who would follow him, was as much in tune with the discourse of

sensibility as he was with the discourse of antislavery. Like Anthony Benezet, this author had understood that, to be heard, abolitionist rhetoric needed to be in touch with the literary fashions of the day.⁴⁴

Within the Society of Friends at least, abolitionist rhetoric was indeed heard. Just nine years later, the London Yearly Meeting felt pleased to be able to report in its general epistle that it “appears, that the Practice of holding Negroes in oppressive and unnatural Bondage, hath been so successfully discouraged, by Friends in some of the Colonies, as to be considerably lessened.” Rather than rest on their laurels, however, they set their sights on a bigger goal. They applauded and encouraged the efforts of antislavery Friends and expressed the wish that “a Traffick so unmerciful and unjust in its Nature, to a Part of our own Species, made equally with ourselves for Immortality, may come to be considered by all in its proper Light; and be utterly abolished, as a Reproach to the *Christian* Profession.” A little more than a decade later, British political life was indeed energized by a widespread abolition campaign that has a good claim to be the first mass political protest movement in modern history.⁴⁵

This book ends at the point where most studies of the abolition movement begin. In 1758 and 1761, Quakers had taken a momentous step, but it is fair to say that it was greeted with indifference by the outside world. The decision of the London Yearly Meeting, for example, is not recorded in any surviving newspaper of the period. Nevertheless, by the late 1780s, almost every British citizen not directly concerned in the Atlantic slavery system seemed to have turned against it. At the same time, American society was showing signs of the polarization on the slavery question that would be one of the factors leading to civil war; as early as the 1780s, the new states of Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts had outlawed slavery. Paradoxically, however, the impact of Quaker antislavery would be seen first in Britain, not America. As we have seen, the reasons why the British abandoned slavery and the slave trade are complex and contested and historians and critics have veered between economic and cultural explanations. Increasingly, however, scholars are united in the view that British abolitionism had its roots in a cultural transformation in which the British middling sorts asserted their social, economic, and cultural values, values which included a

commitment to free trade and free labor alongside a belief in the equality of feeling and the duty to relieve suffering. Slavery, which was based on cruelty and unfree labor, was inimical to those values.

It may be that Quakers were in the vanguard of that middle-class transformation when they debated slavery in the first half of the eighteenth century. Alternatively, it may be that their views on slavery were merely historical oddities, unconnected with broader discourses in the wider world, which just happened to coincide with a rise in antislavery sentiment taking place elsewhere and for other reasons. We can be certain, however, that when antislavery authors and campaigners from beyond the Society of Friends began to agitate against slavery in the 1760s and 1770s, it was to Quaker writings that they first turned. Early in the campaign, the Quaker Anthony Benezet, the Anglican Granville Sharp, and the Methodist John Wesley were in direct correspondence with one another, sharing ideas about how they might convince the wider public that the slave trade should be ended. For Wesley and Sharp, the writings of Benezet and others provided a ready-made discourse of antislavery from which they could draw appropriate words, useful phrases, and tested arguments. Over the previous century, Friends had practiced and refined this discourse away from the public gaze, establishing a set of shared and repeated statements about slavery which were now available for incorporation into the wider English language. When Sharp and Wesley, and later James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson, injected Quaker antislavery rhetoric into mainstream British political discourse, they scored easy victories over the proslavery apologists who had yet to establish an equivalent set of shared and repeated statements with which to defend their practice. The defenders of slavery would soon catch up, but by the time they had, in the late 1780s, the British national mood had turned against them.⁴⁶

Less than thirty years after the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's crucial decision of 1758, abolition societies were springing up around the world. In London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen—to say nothing of Philadelphia itself—Quakers and non-Quakers united to put pressure on governments to intervene in the trade in human beings. Eventually, professional politicians around the world buckled under the pressure, took over the movement, and with painful slowness slavery

was outlawed across the globe throughout the course of the nineteenth century. It is tempting to ask whether this would have happened had not George Fox, more than two centuries earlier, sat down and written his letter “To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves.” It is of course impossible to say, although it is more than probable that vast and implacable cultural, social, and economic forces had more to do with the end of slavery than one man’s short letter a long time in the past. But had Fox not set the Quakers off on their long journey to embrace antislavery, the suspicion must remain that the antislavery campaigns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have taken on a very different character. It is also likely that without the Quakers and their extended debate over slavery, the British and American anti-slavery movements may not have arisen until rather later than they actually did.

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Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PYM	Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
PQM	Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting
PMM	Philadelphia Monthly Meeting
LYM	London Yearly Meeting
NEYM	New England Yearly Meeting
SALP	Mitchell, James T., and Henry Flanders, eds., <i>Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1809</i> (Harrisburg, 1896)
VAP	<i>Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania</i> , 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1752–54)

INTRODUCTION

1. Clarkson, *History*, I, 128–29. For the 1727 advice, see LYM, *Epistles Sent*, 2, 195–96; LYM Minutes, 22–27/3/1727.
2. Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 45.
3. Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility*.
4. Brock, *Quaker Peace Testimony*, 25–26. The best recent general introduction to Quakerism is Dandelion, *Introduction to Quakerism*. The same author has also produced the useful and accessible *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction*.
5. Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few*, 9. Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, 57. Emma Jones Lapsansky, “Past Plainness to Present Simplicity: A Search for Quaker Identity,” in Lapsansky and Verplank, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics*, 1–15, 13.
6. For a general history of Barbados, see Beckles, *History of Barbados*. A closer examination of slavery on the island can be found in Handler and Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados*. For a detailed study of the first years of the

British colony, see Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*. For Quakers in Barbados, see Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*.

7. Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 1, 4, 149–59.
8. There are many histories of Philadelphia (and Pennsylvania more generally); here just a few are noted. For a concise introduction see Simon, *Philadelphia: A Brief History*. For a longer and more detailed account, see Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. An excellent work, challenging many traditional approaches to the city's history but better for the postrevolutionary period, is Nash, *First City*. Focusing on the period before 1740 and particularly useful for the history of relationships between Quakers and Native Americans is Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers*. For William Penn, see Soderlund, ed., *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania, 1680–1684*, which combines cogent commentary and analysis with generous extracts from Penn's writing, and Bronner, *William Penn's "Holy Experiment"*. To read about Philadelphia in context, see Taylor, *American Colonies*, a good recent general history of colonial America.
9. For discussion of the politics of early Pennsylvania, see Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania 1681–1726*, and Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers*.
10. Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, "The Founding: 1681–1701," in Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, 1–32, 31. For a detailed examination of slave demographics in early Philadelphia, see Gary Nash, "Slaves and Slave Owners in Colonial Philadelphia" in Trotter and Smith, eds., *African Americans in Pennsylvania*, 43–72.
11. Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 8, 21.
12. PYM Minutes, 18–24/7/1719: "Book of Discipline." The relationship between Pennsylvanian Quakers and Native Americans has been told in depth by Smolenski in *Friends and Strangers*. For a briefer overview, see Milton Ream, "Philadelphia Friends and the Indians," in Moore, ed., *Friends in the Delaware Valley*, 200–14.
13. I am guided in my use of "antislavery" and "abolition" by Davis's "Notes on Terms" in *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 21–22. Useful sources on amelioration include Ellis, *Politics of Sensibility*, 87–128; Boulukos, *Grateful Slave*, passim, but see 9–10 for a definition; Carey, *British Abolitionism*, 65–67, 107–8, 152–53.
14. There is little evidence of discussion of slavery in the minutes of the women's meetings for the period covered by this book. The minutes of women's meetings are in general very brief, so the absence of evidence should not be taken as evidence of the absence of discussion.
15. My greatly simplified definition of "discourse" is ultimately based on that proposed at length by Foucault in *Archaeology of Knowledge*.
16. Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 141.

17. Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 74, 76. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.
18. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 34, 200, 5.
19. James, *People Among Peoples*, 103.
20. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 213.
21. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 292, 307, 330.
22. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 213n–214n.
23. Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 1, 27, 28.
24. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 5, 187. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*.
25. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 48, 90. The Somerset Case is described in great detail in Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall*.
26. Baxter, *Christian directory*, 557, 559.
27. Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians advocate*. Wood, "Godwyn, Morgan (bap. 1640, d. 1685x1709)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Godwyn was reading Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*. See also Klingberg, ed., *Codrington Chronicle*; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 60–72.
28. Cotton Mather's biography of the missionary John Eliot describes slavery as a "prodigious wickedness." See Mather, *The life and death of the renown'd Mr. John Eliot*, 163–64. Samuel Sewall's pamphlet *The Selling of Joseph* (Boston, 1700), is a more substantial antislavery tract. For the London texts, see Behn, *Oroonoko*, and Southerne, *Oroonoko: A Tragedy*. The most complete collection of Inkle and Yarico stories, with detailed notes and an important introduction, is Felsenstein, *English Trader, Indian Maid*. See also Carey, "Accounts of Savage Nations."
29. The attitudes of Pennsylvanian Quakers to trade are discussed in Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*. Tolles also explores Quaker attitudes to reading and literature at 144–229. The state of transatlantic letter writing in the eighteenth century is explored in Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 9–20.
30. Densmore et al., "Slavery and Abolition to 1830" in Barber et al., eds., *Quaker Crosscurrents*, 65–75, 66. The Golden Rule is articulated in one form or another in all the world's major religions and ethical systems. Christ articulates it, for example, in Luke 6:31: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." The precept was also familiar through the Old Testament, from Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The phrase recurs several times in the New Testament, and its interpretation becomes central to one of the most celebrated of Christ's parables; the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which may have resonated strongly with Quakers who, like biblical Samaritans, were frequently despised outsiders. The rule was well known, and invoking it became the central focus of much antislavery rhetoric. See Carey, *British Abolitionism*, 151–56.

31. Fox, *Gospel family-order and A collection of many select and Christian epistles*; Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters*; Bell, *An epistle to Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Barbadoes, and the other colonies*. For the 1727 advice, see LYM, *Epistles Sent*, 2, 195–96; LYM Minutes, 22–27/3/1727. For the New England texts, see Coleman, *A testimony against that antichristian practice of making slaves of men*; NEYM Minutes, 4/7/1744, cit. Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 175; Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 109.
32. The biblical injunction against man-stealing is “if a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you” (Deuteronomy, 24:7).
33. LYM Minutes, 5/5/1761.

CHAPTER ONE

“The power that giveth liberty and freedom”

1. Most biographies of Fox are sympathetic treatments in the mold of Marsh’s *A Popular Life of George Fox* (1847), which is nevertheless reasonably detailed and reliable. A more controversial (and certainly less hagiographic) biography is Ingle’s *First Among Friends* (1994). For Quaker migration, see Tolles, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*, 9–13.
2. Fox, Epistle 153: “*To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves*,” in *A collection of many select and Christian epistles, letters and testimonies*, 117.
3. “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation,” Acts 17:26.
4. Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 131. Some parts of this section appeared in an earlier form in Carey, “The Barbadian Origins of Quaker Antislavery.”
5. Nickalls, *Journal of George Fox*, 609, 601, 597.
6. Fox, “For the Governour and his Council & Assembly, and all others in power, both civil and military in this island; from the people called Quakers,” in Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*, 65–70. See also “The Addition” to “For the Governour and his Council,” in Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*, 71–79. For a discussion of Anglicanism on Barbados, see Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 68–75, and Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 26. For slave conversion to Quakerism, see Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 162–63.
7. Brinton, *Religious philosophy of Quakerism*, 100; Jones, “G. Fox’s Letter to the Governors,” 759.

8. “The Addition” to Fox, “For the Governour and his Council,” in Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*, 71–79, 71, 77.
9. Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 235.
10. Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*, 5.
11. Nickalls, *Journal of George Fox*, 598–99. The sermon was given at the house of Thomas Rous in Barbados on 21 October 1671. See Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 345n33, and Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 131.
12. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 3–4. Fox’s central references are to: Exodus 12:48; Leviticus 24:22; Deuteronomy 5:13, 29:9–11, and 31:12; Jeremiah 10:25. In general, Fox gives chapter, but not verse, and he often conflates verses, misquotes entirely, or gives inaccurate chapter references, suggesting that his citations often came from memory.
13. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 13–14.
14. *Ibid.*, 16.
15. Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 140.
16. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 17–19.
17. *Ibid.*, 19.
18. *Ibid.*, 17. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 7.
19. Edmundson, *Journal*. His account of the 1671 visit is at 53–57, the account of the 1675 trip is at 70–77, and the account of the 1683 visit is at 108–11.
20. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 10. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 3. Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 31.
21. Rawlin, *Laws of Barbados*, 120–21.
22. Haverford College Quaker Special Collection Richardson MSS, 975C, pp. 21–24. For an extract of this letter with modernized orthography, see Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 66–67.
23. *Ibid.*, 31.
24. As quoted in *ibid.*, 68. The MS is dated 19/7M/1676 and is in the Records of the New England Meeting, Vol. 400, MSS, QCHC.
25. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 10.
26. Curwen, *Relation*, 6. On the question of Edmundson and Curwen’s itineraries, cf. Curwen’s *Relation*, 4–6 with Edmundson’s *Journal*, 77–78.
27. Curwen, *Relation*, 18.
28. Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, 60. The precise dates of Curwen’s stay on Barbados are not clear. However, she writes in a letter from Newport, Rhode Island, that “we are here waiting for our Passage to *Barbadoes*.” The letter is dated “the 9th of the 5th moneth, 1676” which would equate to 9 July 1676 (old style). The journey took “Five Weeks and Two Dayes” and the Curwens stayed on the island for “about Seven Moneths.” That would indicate that they left Barbados in March 1677. The final two letters from Barbados are dated the first month (March), 1676, but this would seem to

be an error. A letter dated “20th of the 1st Moneth, 1676” concludes, “We take leave of you.” This would more likely be 20 March 1677 (old style). It thus appears that the Curwens were present in Barbados approximately from 20 August 1676 to 20 March 1677.

29. Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 149–51.

CHAPTER TWO

“We are against the traffik of men-body”

1. Fox, *Gospel family-order*. Hepburn, *American defence*, “Preface.” Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 13.
2. Tryon, “The Negro’s Complaint of Their Hard Servitude, and the Cruelties Practised upon Them” and “A Discourse in Way of Dialogue, between an Ethiopian or Negro-Slave and a Christian,” parts II and III, respectively, of *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*. For discussion, see Rosenberg, “Thomas Tryon and the Seventeenth-Century Dimensions of Antislavery.” Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians advocate*.
3. Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 414–15. This section of Chapter 2 is a revised version of Carey, “Inventing a Culture of Antislavery.”
4. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 309. Gerbner, “We are against the traffik of men-body,” 150. Hopkins, “The Germantown Protest,” 22.
5. Halpern, in “Background and Circumstances of the 1688 Protest Against Slavery, Part II,” 60, writes that “It seems clear that the original protest remained in the archives of the Philadelphia Meeting at Arch Street. A footnote (p. 12) in Thomas Drake’s *Quakers and Slavery in America*, located the document in the Records of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Orthodox), Volume N24. But in 1982, when Mark Frazier Lloyd, Director of the Germantown Society, made a search, it was found missing. In 1874 the records of the Arch Street Meeting were divided between the Quaker historical libraries at Swarthmore and Haverford. It is thought that in this subdivision the document was somehow misfiled and its location is, as of this writing, still unknown.” A further search in the Arch Street records was conducted in 2006, and the misfiled document was again located. It is now housed in the Quaker Collection at Haverford College Library, Pennsylvania.
6. In addition to the original manuscript, a manuscript copy of the protest is recorded in PYM Minutes, 5/7/1688, Vol. A 1.2. This copy of the minutes was made in 1781, however, and the copy of the Protest is in a different and almost certainly later hand, suggesting that it might have been written in after 1844. It has also been printed several times. The first print was as “The

- German Friends,” in *The Friend* (1844). The article is signed “N” (Nathan Kite). It was then distributed widely as a pamphlet, and reprinted in many places. A photographic facsimile and transcript can be found in Learned, *The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius*, 260–63. More recent copies, all based on nineteenth-century transcriptions, can be found in *Journal of Negro History* 18 (1933), 99–101, and in Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 69. A transcript based on the original document can be found in Gerbner, “We are against the traffik of men-body,” 168–69. At the time of writing, several online versions are also available.
7. Binder-Johnson, “The Germantown Protest of 1688,” 145. Gerbner, “We are against the traffik of men-body,” 160, 167.
 8. PMM Minutes, 29/2/1698.
 9. Colley, *Captives*, 23–134. *Epistles of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in London*, I, 56–57. Lay, *All Slave-Keepers*, 15–16.
 10. “The Addition” to “For the Governour and his Council,” in Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests*, 77.
 11. Hopkins, “The Germantown Protest,” 24.
 12. Kite, “The German Friends,” 125–26. Learned, *Life of Pastorius*, 260. See also the much shorter but useful biography in Horle et al., *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania*, I, 586–90.
 13. Hepburn, *American defence*, 18.
 14. Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, I, 136.
 15. Whittier, *Pennsylvania Hall*, 6.
 16. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 309. LYM, *Epistles Received*, I, 69–72. PYM Minutes, 5/7/1688.
 17. Nash, *Quakers and Politics*, 159–60, and, for a detailed account of the controversy, 127–80 passim. See also the introduction to Frost, *The Keithian Controversy in Early Pennsylvania*, and Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers*, 149–77.
 18. Nash, *Quakers and Politics*, 153. Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers*, 169.
 19. *An exhortation and caution to Friends*. Fox, Epistle 153: “To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves,” in *A collection of many select and Christian epistles*, 117. Frost, *The Keithian Controversy*, xvii.
 20. Fox, *Gospel family-order* (1676), 16.
 21. Hepburn, *American defence*, 23–35, and Ramsay, *Objections to the abolition of the slave trade*.
 22. For a brief discussion of how Quakers used this biblical text in the early years of what would become known as the Underground Railroad, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 118–20. Drake, however, mistakenly credits Granville Sharp (1735–1813) as the first to apply this text to colonial slavery.

23. Thomas, *An historical and geographical account of the province and country of Pensilvania*, 53. Hepburn, *American defence*, “preface.” Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 15.
24. Frost, *The Keithian Controversy*, xx.
25. PYM Minutes, 23/7/1696. PMM Minutes, 30/7/1698. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 21.
26. For details of Southeby’s letter, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 19–20, and Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19. Morgan’s letter is at Haverford College, HSS MS 990 B-R. It is reproduced and discussed by Drake in “Cadwalader Morgan: Antislavery Quaker of the Welsh Tract” and in *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 20. See also Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 70, and Gerbner, “‘We are against the traffik of men-body,’” 151.
27. PYM Minutes, 23/7/1696. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19. James, *A People Among Peoples*, 112.
28. That the letter to Barbados was intended to be written is discussed in PMM Minutes, 30/7/1698. This “trew copy off ye paper sent” is quoted at the end of Robert Pile’s letter in Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 72. Pile’s letter is also discussed by Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 20–21. Neither locate the manuscript, but the source appears to be J.M.T., “Progress of Anti-Slavery Among Friends,” *Friends Intelligencer* 31 (1874): 91–93. The author, whom Drake tentatively identifies as Joseph M. Truman, Jr, says his source is “two old documents loaned me.” I have been unable to locate the manuscript.
29. PMM Minutes, 30/7/1698. A few months later, the Monthly Meeting approved a letter “being drawn for the Encouragement of Jamaica friends,” but it is not clear whether this letter was concerned with the slavery question. See PMM Minutes, 27/11/1698/99.
30. Here, I quote the letter as it is given in Cadbury, “An Early Quaker Anti-Slavery Statement.” For a detailed examination of Quaker dreams, including analysis of several that concern slavery, see Gerona, *Night Journeys*. A few Quaker dreams about slavery are discussed by Cadbury in “Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,” 182. See also Kirschner, “Tending to Edify, Astonish, and Instruct.”
31. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19–20. Sobel, *Teach Me Dreams*, 55–56. Gerona, *Night Journeys*, 23–27. For a brief biography of Pile, see Horle, *Lawmaking and Legislators*, I, 614–15.
32. Fox, *Gospel family-order* (1676), 16. PYM Minutes, 23/7/1696. PMM Minutes, 28/8/1698.
33. PMM Minutes, 29/1/1700. Frost, “George Fox’s Ambiguous Anti-slavery Legacy,” in Mullet, *New Light on George Fox*, 69–88. Gray’s treatise is reproduced at 82–84. Edmundson, *Journal*, 75–76.
34. Frost, “George Fox’s Ambiguous Anti-slavery Legacy,” 80.

CHAPTER THREE
"The grief of divers friends"

1. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 40. The Pennsylvania Assembly normally had around twenty-five members. Three men (Isaac Norris, Joshua Hoopes, and Nicholas Fairlamb) sat on both the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1711. In 1712, seven men (Caleb Pusey, George Harland, John Sotcher, John Wood, Nicholas Fairlamb, Samuel Preston, and Thomas Watson) sat on both the PA and the PYM. See PYM Minutes, 1711, 1712, and VAP, II, 106, 122. For context, see also Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 36. Detailed biographies of individual Assembly members can be found in Horle, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania*. The clearest account of the legal processes of 1680–1780 regarding slavery in the colony is still to be found in Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 1–37. See also Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 41–43.
2. The legal texts can be found, respectively, in SALP, II, 54–56; SALP, II, 77–79; "Report of Mr. Attorney-General upon the acts passed at two general assemblies," in SALP, II, 495; and SALP, II, 233–36. For discussion see Marietta and Rowe, *Troubled Experiment*, 19–20, 31–32.
3. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 22. Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 3. The legal texts are at SALP, II, 105–9; SALP, II, 280–91; SALP, II, 382–88.
4. The record of the petition and the response can both be found in VAP, 110.
5. SALP, II, 433–36; VAP, 112, 121.
6. For a brief biographies of Southeby, see Carrol, "William Southeby, Early Quaker Antislavery Writer," and Horle, *Lawmaking and Legislators*, I, 683–85. For the New York uprising, see Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 132–39.
7. SALP, II, 236–37.
8. Hazard, *Pennsylvania Archives*, I, 162, 160; SALP, II, 543–44, 552. On Penn's health, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 23, and James, *People Among Peoples*, 118.
9. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 22.
10. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 20, 148. PYM Minutes, 18/7/1711.
11. PYM Minutes, 21–4/7/1712. LYM, *Epistles Received*, II, 132–34.
12. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 21. James, *People Among Peoples*, 119, 118. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 25.
13. LYM, *Epistles Sent*, II, 195–96.
14. The advice was sent in the letter to Pennsylvania, but was not included in either the general epistle or in the specific epistles to other colonies. London did not interrogate other colonies about their role in slave trading until 1727. For these letters, see LYM *Epistles Sent*, II, 414–19.
15. See Chater, *Untold Histories*, 35–73.

16. PYM Minutes, 18–22/7/1714; LYM, *Epistles Received*, II, 171–74. For a series of personal intercolonial letters on the subject of slavery from exactly this period, see Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 72, 126–30.
17. PYM Minutes, 18–22/7/1715. PYM Minutes, 23/7/1696.
18. PYM Minutes, 15–19/7/1716.
19. PYM Minutes, 18–24/7/1719: “Book of Discipline.” Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 36–37; Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 126–27.
20. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 317. Little is known about Hepburn himself. See Cadbury, “John Hepburn and His Book against Slavery, 1715.”
21. Hepburn, *American defence*, “Preface.”
22. Ibid, 1–2.
23. Ibid, 3–4. Barbauld, *Epistle to William Wilberforce*; Austen, *Mansfield Park*.
24. Hepburn, *American defence*, 4. For the timing and implications of Vassa’s name change to Equiano, see Carretta, “Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa?” For discussion, see Carey, “Olaudah Equiano: Nativity, Identity, and Representation.”
25. Hepburn, *American defence*, 5. Addison’s story is in *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, II, 338–41. For analysis, see Carey, “‘Accounts of Savage Nations’: *The Spectator* and the Americas.” For analysis of Bicknell and Day, *The Dying Negro: A Poetical Epistle*, see Carey, *British Abolitionism*, 75–84. For a history of suicide and slavery, see Snyder, “Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America.”
26. Hepburn, *American defence*, 7. The printing is unclear, and a possible variant reading of the ninth commandment is that the slave replies: “yes, I do, we serve to be hung up and Beat.”
27. Hepburn, *American defence*, 18, 8.
28. Ibid, 10.
29. Ibid, 11–12. For the Codrington Estate, see Klingberg, *Codrington Chronicle*. Hepburn may also have been aware of William Fleetwood’s widely distributed SPG sermon of 1711, which urged amelioration of slavery and encouraged slaveholders to convert their slaves, although there is no evidence for this.
30. Hepburn, *American defence*, 13–14. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, II, 4, 23.
31. Hepburn, *American defence*, 15–19.
32. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 16; *An exhortation and caution to Friends concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*, 2. Hepburn, *American defence*, 20.
33. Ibid., “Preface.” For early poems about slavery, see Basker, *Amazing Grace*, 1–51. A short Quaker manuscript poem dating from 1700 is reproduced in J. William Frost, “George Fox’s Ambiguous Anti-slavery Legacy,” in Mullet, *New Light on George Fox*, 81–82.

34. The Longitude Prize was eventually (and grudgingly) awarded to James Harrison in 1773 for his marine chronometer. The episode has been memorably retold by Dava Sobel in her best-selling *Longitude*. On perpetual motion in this period, see Ord-Hume, *Perpetual Motion*, 32–37.
35. Hepburn, *American defence*, 22.
36. Ibid. The wise man in question is Qohelet, son of David, and the text is Ecclesiastes 4:12. In Ecclesiastes 3:13, Qohelet states that “every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God,” which might be interpreted as a statement of antislavery. On Southeby’s presumed authorship, see Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 317n47. The OED’s definition of “Motive” (sense 2) is “a matter or issue moved or brought forward, esp. a question requiring an answer; a motion, a proposition. Freq. in to move (also make) a motive.”
37. *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men*, in Hepburn, *American defence*, 23–36, 23.
38. Ramsay, *Objections to the abolition of the slave trade*.
39. *Arguments against Making Slaves of Men*, 23, 27.
40. Ibid, 27–30.
41. Ibid, 33–34.
42. The original query was answered in *The Athenian Mercury*, III, 30 (1691). The revised answer is in *The Athenian Oracle*, 3 vols. (1703–4), I, 545–48 (in some editions there is a printing error that gives the pages as 529–31). The text is reproduced verbatim in Hepburn, 37–44. The history of the Athenian Society is told in Parks, *John Dunton and the English Book Trade*, 75–76. See also Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late Stuart England*. For Dunton’s spat with Penn, see Parks, *John Dunton and the English Book Trade*, 93–94.
43. On the Southeby attempts, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 29, PMM Minutes, 4/1716, and Carrol, “William Southeby, Early Quaker Antislavery Writer.” On Farmer, see New England Yearly Meeting Minutes, 4/1717, cited in Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 175. Burling’s “Some observations concerning slave-keeping” is reprinted in Lay, *All Slave-Keepers*, 6–15. Developments beyond Pennsylvania are discussed in Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 29–37; Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 22–23; Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 312–13; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 87–90.

CHAPTER FOUR

“O unrighteous gain!”

- I. PYM Minutes, 14–18/7/1728. The letter from London had been written in 1727, but did not arrive in Philadelphia in time to be considered by the 1727 Yearly Meeting. For letters from Friends buying and selling slaves, see

- Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 123, 126–30. On the decline in slaveholding, see Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 22–23, 166–67.
2. LYM Minutes, 22–27/3/1727. The handwriting is unclear but, to judge from the list of delegates present, the “Benjamin Boaling” ordered to send the minute may have been either Benjamin Horner from Yorkshire, Benjamin Hoale from Lincolnshire, or, most likely, Benjamin Bourne, who was among the signatories to the epistles to the plantations.
 3. SALP, IV, 52–56, 59–64.
 4. *The Epistle from the Yearly-Meeting of Friends and Brethren, held in London, by Adjournment, from the 22d Day of the Third Month, to the 26th Day of the Same, inclusive, 1727*. For the manuscript letter to Philadelphia, see LYM, MS, *Epistles Sent*, II, 414. For Rhode Island, 415–17. For Long Island, 417–19. For Virginia, 419–20. For Maryland, 421–22. For Barbados, 422–24.
 5. Sandiford, *Brief examination*. Almost all the biographical information we have about Sandiford is gleaned from his own writings, with a very few additional details being found in Vaux, *Memoirs of the lives of B. Lay and R. Sandiford*. The printing history of the book can be gleaned from Franklin’s letter to John Wright, 14 November 1789, online at *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, <http://franklinpapers.org/> (accessed 5 November 2009). Davis’s discussion is in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 320.
 6. Sandiford, *Brief examination*, “Dedication.” Carolyn M. Peters, “Matthew Hughes,” in Horle, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania*, 519–21.
 7. Sandiford, *Brief examination*, “Dedication.” The first American edition of *Robinson Crusoe* was published by Hugh Gaine in New York in 1774, but, as Eve Tavor Bannet has shown, early American versions of the book, often as “epitomes” or abridgements, circulated widely. See Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories*, 21–46.
 8. Sandiford, *Brief examination*, “Preface.”
 9. *Ibid*, 1.
 10. *Ibid*, 4–5. Biblical references to the destruction of the Canaanites can be found in Deuteronomy 7:1 and 20:16–17. Sandiford also cites Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, (Ca. 75 CE) V, chs. 1 and 6.
 11. Sandiford, *Brief examination*, 6–9.
 12. *Ibid*, 6–28, *passim*.
 13. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 40. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 23. Sandiford, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 3, 4, 90. Sandiford, *Brief examination*, 71.
 14. PYM Minutes, 20–24/7/1729.
 15. Lay, *All Slave-Keepers*, 21–22.

16. Ibid., 20, 21.
17. Basker, *Amazing Grace*, 38. The slavery sections of Defoe's poem are also reproduced at 38–39.
18. Sandiford, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 3–5. Accounts of Quaker sufferings would shortly afterward be published. See Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers*.
19. Sandiford, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 7–8. Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*. Wood does not discuss Sandiford, but his analysis does cover a great number of other abolitionist writers.
20. Sandiford, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 8. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 79.
21. Sandiford, *Mystery of Iniquity*, 108. PYM Minutes, 19–23/7/1730. PYM Minutes, 15–19/7/1716.
22. Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 124. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 39. Coleman, *A testimony*, ii, iii.
23. Rush's "Biographical Anecdotes of Benjamin Lay" is in *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical*. Different versions of Lay's life before reaching Philadelphia exist. Although Vaux thought that Lay spent around thirteen years in Barbados, Rowntree, in "Benjamin Lay (1681–1759)," concludes it was probably only about a year. The evidence is summed up in Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 322n. For the historians' views, see James, *A People Among Peoples*, 126; Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 321.
24. Child, *Memoir*, 21–24. Vaux, *Memoirs*, 28–29.
25. Vaux, *Memoirs*, 26–27.
26. Child, *Memoir*, 17. Rush, "Biographical Anecdotes," 307.
27. Rush, "Biographical Anecdotes" 308–9. Lay, *All slave-keepers*, 134.
28. The quotations in the preceding paragraphs are all from Lay, *All slave-keepers*. Respectively: 32–33, 44, 34, 39–40, and 84.
29. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 25.
30. PYM Minutes, 20–24/7/1735. PYM Minutes, 18–22/7/1736.
31. PYM Minutes, 17–21/7/1737.
32. PYM Minutes, 16–20/7/1738. The advertisement appeared in several issues of the *American Weekly Mercury* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. See Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 46n. On slave ownership, see Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 47.
33. PYM Minutes, 18–22/7/1742. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 32–33.
34. PYM Minutes, 17–21/7/1743. For both current practice and the history of the queries, see "Advices and Queries," online at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/advices/> (accessed 10 August 2011).

CHAPTER FIVE

"A practice so repugnant to our Christian profession"

1. LYM Minutes, 5/5/1761.
2. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 32-34. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 126-77, passim. The challenge to Williams's argument was most cogently put by Drescher in *Econocide*. Some of the main documents of the ensuing debate were collected in Bender, *The Antislavery Debate*.
3. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 23-24. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 166.
4. *Ibid.*, 60.
5. *Ibid.*, 34, 35, 29. Chalkley, *Journal*, in *A collection of the works of Thomas Chalkley*.
6. Cady, *John Woolman: The Mind of the Quaker Saint*; Reynolds, *The wisdom of John Woolman*; Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman*. To be fair, Slaughter's contribution is a solid and scholarly biography, despite the title. Davis's discussion of Woolman can be found in *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 489.
7. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 32-33. For reliable recent biographies, see Plank, *John Woolman's Path to the Peaceable Kingdom*, and Slaughter, *Beautiful Soul of John Woolman*.
8. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 13.
9. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 198.
10. *Ibid.*, 44-45.
11. *Ibid.*, 200.
12. Fox, Epistle 153: "To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves," in *A collection of many select and Christian epistles, letters and testimonies*, 117. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 14. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 201.
13. Fox, *Gospel family-order*, 18.
14. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 202.
15. *Ibid.*, 207, 209.
16. PYM Minutes, 19-23/7/1730.
17. PYM Minutes, 14-19/9/1754
18. For a summary, see Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 27n.
19. *An Epistle of caution and advice*, 1-2 (the manuscript can be found in PYM 14-19/9M/1754). Nash, "Slaves and Slave Owners in Colonial Philadelphia," in Trotter and Smith, eds., *African Americans in Pennsylvania*, 43-72.
20. *Epistle of caution and advice*, 2-6.
21. *Ibid.*, 7.
22. Tennenhouse, *Importance of Feeling English*, 1. For discussion of Richardson in America, see Tennenhouse, 53-56, and Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories*, 132-35.

For publication and reception of the Scottish Enlightenment in Philadelphia, see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*. See also Hook, “Philadelphia, Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in Sher and Smitten, eds, *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, 227–41. For the classic account of the Great Awakening, see Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 280–342. For the “Age of Sensibility,” see Frye, “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility.” For detailed examination of the role of sentiment in the British antislavery debate, see Carey, *British Abolitionism*.

23. *Epistle of caution and advice*, 2–3, 5.
24. PYM Minutes, 20–26/9/1755.
25. Ibid.
26. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 55. A brief account of the crisis can be found in Theodore Thayer, “Town into City 1746–1765,” in Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, 104–5. For a detailed study see Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, especially Chapter 7. The quote is from Marietta, 158.
27. Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 330. Marietta, *Reformation of American Quakerism*, 116, 111n. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 55. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 29.
28. PMM Minutes, 26/8/1757.
29. The James Logan in question is presumably James Logan Jr. (1728–1803). Frost reproduces two letters from 1721–23 in which the elder James Logan discusses the management of his slaves. See Frost, *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 127.
30. PQM Minutes, 6/2/1758; 7/8/1758. Shrewsbury QM Minutes, 30/1/1758; 24/4/1758.
31. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, 91–92.
32. Ibid, 92–93.
33. PYM Minutes, 23–29/9/1758.
34. James, *A People Among Peoples*, 140.
35. PMM Minutes, 27/2/1761.
36. LYM Minutes, 22–27/3/1727. Bell, *An epistle to Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Barbadoes, and the other colonies*. For discussion, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 49–50.
37. *The Epistle, from the Yearly-Meeting, Held in London, by Adjournments, from the 15th Day of the Fifth Month 1758, to the 20th of the same, inclusive*.
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39. Benezet, *Observations*, 3.
40. LYM Minutes, 14/5/1761.
41. LYM Epistles Sent, IV (1756-74), 136-37.
42. *Ibid.*, 139-42.
43. *The Epistle, from the Yearly-Meeting, Held in London, by Adjournments, from the 23rd of the Fifth Month 1763, to the 31st of the same, inclusive.*
44. Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, v.
45. *The Epistle, from the Yearly-Meeting, Held in London, by Adjournments, from the 8th of the Sixth Month 1772, to the 13th of the same, inclusive.*
46. Carey, *British Abolitionism*, 145-51.

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The manuscript minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting between 1681 and 1779 are bound together in three volumes held at the Quaker Special Collection. These are:

Vol. A 1.1 (1681-1710).

Vol. A 1.2 (1681-1746).

Vol. A 1.3 (1747-1779).

The first volume contains the uncorrected original, or foul, manuscript minutes for the period 1681-1710. The second volume contains a corrected, or fair, copy manuscript of the minutes for the period 1681-1746. These appear to have been started around 1700 by Phineas Pemberton, then continued by Israel Pemberton, but for the most part completed by James Pemberton in 1781. The third volume contains a fair copy of the minutes for 1747-1779, also apparently written out by James Pemberton. The foul copy of the minutes for the period 1711-1781 appears to have been lost. Comparison of the duplicated minutes for the 1681-1710 period shows that there are many orthographical alterations, but rarely, if ever, do these change the sense of the minute. Nevertheless, a note tipped into the front of Volume A 1.2 and signed "Jonathan Evans, 1835," laments "that there is no data or substantial evidence of the origin and settlement of this religious and highly beneficial institution, than what is contained in the following records." As other scholars have done, therefore, I have quoted from the Pemberton fair copy of the PYM minutes (A 1.2-3) for the period 1711-1779. Unlike other scholars, I have quoted from the foul copy of the minutes (A 1.1) for the period 1681-1710.

All manuscripts cited for the London Yearly Meeting are held at the Library of the Religious Society of Friends at Friends House, London. These

appear to be foul copies for the minutes of the meetings themselves, but fair copies of the epistles sent.

Dates for citations from manuscript minutes are given Quaker style, with the month designated by number rather than by name. In the past this took some explanation. In this digital age I assume that readers are familiar with the notion that, for example, June is the sixth month. There are two points to remember. First, I give dates in the order day/month/year. This is the order in which eighteenth-century American colonists gave dates, and which is today the internationally agreed format. Second, note that Britain and its colonies adopted the Gregorian Calendar only in 1752. Before 1752, the New Year started on 25 March and, in Quaker reckoning, March was the first month. After 1752, January is the first month. Thus, for example, the date 23/6/1750 is 23 August 1750, but the date 23/6/1754 is 23 June 1754. Care should be taken when reading dates early in the year. For example, 27/11/1698/99 (Old Style) is 27 January 1699 (New Style). When using Old Style dates, I have given the date actually written on the manuscript, and have not attempted to convert the date to its New Style equivalent.

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